

in all useful learning, philosophy and divinity. If he had not thus closely applied himself to study, it had been but a jest for him to say, *I will be wise*, for those that will attain the end must take the right way. Solomon was a man of great quickness, and yet, instead of using that (with many) as an excuse for slothfulness, he prest it upon himself as an inducement to diligence, and the easier he found it to master a good notion the more intent he would be, that he might be the master of the more good notions. Those that have the best parts should take the greatest pains, as those that have the largest stock should trade most. He applied himself not only to know what lay on the surface, but to search what lay hid, out of the common view and road; nor did he search a little way, and then give it over, because he did not presently find what he searched for, but he *sought it out*, went to the bottom of it; nor did he aim to know things only, but the reasons of things, that he might give an account of them.

(2.) Yet his success was not answerable or satisfying. *I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me*, I could not compass it; after all, *This only I know, that I know nothing*, and the more I know, the more I see there is to be known, and the more sensible I am of my own ignorance; *That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?* He means God himself, his counsels, and his works: when he searched into these, he presently found himself puzzled and run a ground; he could not order his speech by reason of darkness. *It is higher than heaven, what can he do?* Job xi. 8. Blessed be God there is nothing we have to do but it is plain and easy, *the word is nigh us*, Prov. viii. 9. But there is a great deal we would wish to know, which is *far off, and exceeding deep*, among the secret things which belong not to us. And probably it is a culpable ignorance and error that Solomon here laments, that his pleasures, and the many amusements of his court had blinded his eyes, and cast a mist before them, so that he could not attain true wisdom, as he designed.

2. He owns and laments the instances of his folly, in which he had exceeded, as in wisdom he came short.

Here is, 1. His enquiry concerning the evil of sin: He *applied his heart to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness*. Observe, (1.) The knowledge of sin is a difficult knowledge and hard to be attained; Solomon took pains for it. Sin has many disguises, with which it palliates itself, as being loth to appear sin, and it is very hard to strip it of these, and to see it in its true nature and colours. (2.) It is necessary to our repentance for sin, that we be acquainted with the evil of it, as it is necessary to the cure of a disease to know its nature, causes, and malignity. St. Paul therefore valued the divine law, because it discovered sin to him, Rom. vii. 7. Solomon, that in the days of his folly had set his wits on work to invent pleasures, and sharpen them, and was ingenious in making provision for the flesh, now God had opened his eyes is as industrious to find out the aggravations of sin; and so to put an edge upon his repentance. Ingenious sinners should be ingenious penitents, and wit and learning, among other the spoils of *the strong man armed*, should be divided by the Lord Jesus. (3.) It well becomes penitents to say the worst they can of sin; for the truth is, we can never speak bad enough of it. Solomon here, for his further humiliation, desired to see more, 1. Of the *sinfulness of sin*; that is it which he lays the greatest stress upon in this enquiry, *to know the wickedness of folly*; by which, perhaps, he means his own iniquity, the sin of uncleanness, for that was commonly called *folly in Israel*, Gen. xxxiv. 7. Deut. xxii. 21. Judg. ix. 6. 2 Sam. xiii. 12. When he indulged himself in it he made a light matter of it, but now he desires to see the *wickedness* of it, its *great wickedness*, so Joseph speaks of it, Gen. xxxix. 9. Or it may be taken there generally for all sin. Many extenuate their sins with this, they were *folly*, but Solomon sees *wickedness* in those follies; an offence to God and a wrong to conscience, *this is wickedness*, Jer. iv. 18. Zech. v. 8. 2. Of the *folly of sin*; as there is a *wickedness in folly*, so there is a *folly in wickedness*, even foolishness and madness. Wilful sinners are fools and madmen, they act contrary both to right reason and to their true interest.

2. The result of this enquiry,

(1.) He now discovered more than ever of the evil of that great sin, which he himself had been guilty of, the *loving many strange women*, 1 Kings xi. 1. this is that which he here most feelingly laments, and in very pathetical expressions.

1. He found the remembrance of the sin very grievous; O how heavy did it lie upon his conscience, what an agony was he in upon the thought of it! the wickedness, the foolishness, the madness that he had been guilty of; *I find it more bitter than death*. As great a terror seized him in reflexion upon it, as if he had been under the arrests of death. Thus do they that have their sins set in order before them by a sound conviction, cry out against them; they are bitter as gall, nay, bitter as death to all true penitents. Uncleanness is a sin that is, in its own nature, more pernicious than death itself. Death may be made honourable and comfortable, but this sin can be no other but shame and pain. Prov. v. 9, 11.

2. He had found the temptation to the sin very dangerous, and that it was extremely difficult, and next to impossible for those that ventured into the temptation to escape the sin, and for those that

had fallen into sin to recover themselves by repentance. The heart of the adulterous woman is *snare and nets*; she plays her game to ruin souls, with as much art and subtilty as ever any fowler used to take a silly bird. The methods such sinners use are both deceiving and destroying, as snares and nets are. The unwary souls are enticed into them by the bait of pleasure; which they greedily catch at, and promise themselves satisfaction in; but they are taken before they are aware, and taken irrecoverably. Her hands are as bands, with which, under colour of fond embraces, she holds those fast that she hath seized; they are *held in the cords of their own sin*, Prov. v. 22. Lust gets strength by being gratified, and its charms are more prevalent.

3. He reckoned it a great instance of God's favour to any man; if by his grace he has kept him from this sin: *He that pleaseth God shall escape from her*; shall be preserved either from being tempted to this sin, or from being overcome by the temptation. Those that are kept from this sin, must acknowledge it is God that keeps them, and not any strength or resolution of their own, must acknowledge it a great mercy; and they that would have grace sufficient for them to arm them against this sin, must be careful to please God in every thing, by keeping his ordinances, Levit. xviii. 30.

4. He reckoned it a sin, that is, as fore a punishment of other sins, as a man can fall under in this life: *The sinner shall be taken by her*, i. e. 1. Those that allow themselves in other sins, by which their minds are blinded and their consciences debauched, are the more easily drawn to this. 2. It is just with God to leave them to themselves to fall into it. See Rom. i. 26, 28. Ephes. iv. 18, 19. Thus doth Solomon, as it were, with horror, bless himself from the sin in which he had plunged himself.

1. He now discovered more than ever of the general corruption of man's nature. He runs up that stream to the fountain, as his father had done before him on a like occasion, Psal. li. 5. *Behold I was shapen in iniquity*.

2. He endeavoured to find out the number of his actual transgressions, ver. 27. *Behold this have I found*, i. e. this I hoped to have found, I thought I could have understood my errors and have brought in a compleat list, at least of the heads of them; I thought I could have counted them one by one, and have found out the account; which, as a penitent, he desired to find out, that he might the more particularly acknowledge them; and, generally, the more particular we are in the confession of sin, the more comfort we have in the sense of the pardon; and, as a preacher, that he might the more particularly give warning to others. Note, A sound conviction of one sin will put us upon enquiring into the whole confederacy; and the more we see amiss in ourselves the more diligently we should enquire further into our own faults, that what we see not may be discovered to us, Job xxxiv. 32.

(2.) He soon found himself at a loss, and perceived that they were innumerable, ver. 28. *which yet my soul seeketh*, I am still counting, and still desirous to find out the account, but I find not, I cannot count them all, nor find out the account of them to perfection; I still make new and amazing discoveries of the desperate wickedness that there is in my own heart, Jer. xvii. 9, 10. *who can know it? who can understand his errors? who can tell how oft he offends?* Psal. xix. 12. He finds that if God enter into judgment with him, or he with himself, for all his thoughts, words and actions, he is *not able to answer for one of a thousand*, Job ix. 3. This he illustrates, by comparing the corruption of his own heart and life with the corruption of the world, where he scarce found one good man among a thousand, nay, among all the thousand wives and concubines which he had, he did not find *one good woman*; even so, saith he, when I come to recollect and review my own thoughts, words, and actions, and all the passages of my life past, perhaps, among those that were manly, I might find one good among a thousand, and that was all, the rest; even of those, had some corruption or other in them; he found, ver. 20. he had sinned even in doing good; but for those that were effeminate, that passed in the indulgence of his pleasures, they were all naught; in that part of his life there did not appear so much as one of a thousand good. In our hearts and lives there appears little good at the best, but sometimes none at all. Doubtless this is not intended as a censure of the female sex in general, it is probable enough that there have been and are more good women than good men, Acts xvii. 4, 12. but he only alludes to his own sad experience; and, perhaps, there may be this further in it, he doth in his proverbs warn us against the snares both of the *evil man* and of the *strange woman*, Prov. ii. 12, 16. iv. 14. v. 3. Now he had observed the ways of the *evil women* to be more deceitful and dangerous than those of the *evil men*, that it was more difficult to discover their frauds, and elude their snares; and therefore he compares sin to an adulteress, Prov. ix. 13. and perceives he can no more find out the deceitfulness of his own heart, than he can that of a strange woman, whose ways are moveable that thou canst not know them.

3. He therefore runs up all the streams of actual transgression to the fountain of original corruption: The source and spring of all the folly and madness that is in the world, is in man's apostasy from God, and his degeneracy from his primitive rectitude, ver. 18 Z

ver. 29. *Lo, this only have I found*; when I could not find out the particulars, yet the gross account was manifest enough, it is as clear as the sun, that man is corrupted and revolted, and is not as he was made. Observe,

1. How man was made by the wisdom and goodness of God: *God made man upright; Adam the first man*, so the Chaldee. God made him, and he made him *upright*, i. e. such a one as he should be, being made a rational creature, he was in all respects such a one as a rational creature should be, *upright*, without any irregularity, one could find no fault in him: he was *upright*, i. e. determined to God only, in opposition to the *many inventions* which afterwards he turned aside to. Man, as he came out of God's hands, was (as we may say) a little picture of his Maker, who is *good and upright*.

2. How he was marred, and, in effect, unmade by his own folly and badness: *They have sought out many inventions*; they, i. e. our first parents, or the whole race, all in general, and every one in particular. *They have sought out great inventions*, so some; inventions to become great, as gods, Gen. iii. 5. Or, *the inventions of the great ones*, so some; i. e. of the angels that fell, the *Magnates*. Or, *many inventions*; man, instead of resting in what God had found for him, was for seeking to mend himself, like the prodigal that left his father's house to go seek his fortune. Instead of being for one, he was for many; instead of being for God's institutions, he was for his own inventions. The law of his creation would not hold him, but he would be at his own dispose, and follow his own sentiments and inclinations. *Vain man would be wise*, wiser than his Maker; is giddy and unsettled in his pursuits, and therefore has *many inventions*. They that forsake God wander endlessly. Mens actual transgressions are multiplied: Solomon could not find out how many they are, ver. 28. but he found they were *very many*. Many kinds of sins, and those often repeated; *they are more than the hairs on our heads*, Psal. xl. 12.

C H A P. VIII.

Solomon, in this chapter, comes to recommend wisdom to us, as the most powerful antidote against both the temptations and vexations that arise from the vanity of the world. Here is, 1. The benefit and praise of wisdom, ver. 1. 2. Some particular instances of wisdom prescribed to us. (1.) *We must keep in due subjection to the government God hath set over us*, ver. 2, —5. (2.) *We must get ready for sudden evils, and especially for sudden death*, ver. 6. —8. (3.) *We must arm our selves against the temptation of an oppressive government, and not think it strange*, ver. 9, 10. *The impunity of oppressors makes them more daring*, ver. 11. *but in the issue it will be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked*, ver. 12, 13. *and therefore the present prosperity of the wicked, and afflictions of the righteous, ought not to be a stumbling-block to us*, ver. 14. (4.) *We must cheerfully use the gifts of God's providence*, ver. 15. (5.) *We must with an intire satisfaction acquiesce in the will of God, and not pretending to find the bottom, we must humbly and silently adore the depth of his unsearchable counsels, being assured they are all wise, and just, and good*, ver. 16, 17.

1. **W**H O is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a mans wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. 2. I counsel thee to keep the kings commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. 3. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing, for he doth whatsoever pleaseth him. 4. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What dost thou? 5. Who so keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise mans heart discerneth both time and judgment.

Here is, 1. An encomium of wisdom, ver. 1. that is, of true piety, guided in all its exercises by prudence and discretion; the wise man is the good man, that knows God and glorifies him, knows himself and doth well for himself: his wisdom is a great happiness to him; for,

(1.) It advanceth him above his neighbour, and makes him more excellent than they. *Who is as the wise man?* Note, Heavenly wisdom will make a man an incomparable man. No man without grace, though he be learned, or noble, or rich, is to be compared with a man that has true grace, and is therefore accepted of God.

(2.) It makes him useful among his neighbours, and very serviceable to them; *who but the wise man knows the interpretation of a thing?* i. e. understands the times, and the events of them, and their critical junctures, so as to direct *what Israel ought to do*, 1 Chron. xii. 32.

(3.) It beautifies a man in the eyes of his friends: *It makes his face to shine*, as Moses's did when he came down from the mount, it puts an honour upon a man, and a lustre on his whole conversation, makes him to be regarded and taken notice of, and gains

him respect, as Job xxix. 7, &c. it makes him lovely and amiable, and the darling and blessing of his country. *The strength of his face*, i. e. the fierceness and severity of his countenance (so some understand the last clause) *shall be changed* by it into that which is sweet and obliging: Even those whose natural temper is rough and morose, by wisdom are strangely altered, and become mild and gentle, and learn to look pleasant.

(4.) It emboldens a man against his adversaries; their attempts, and contempts: *The boldness of his face shall be doubled* by wisdom, it will add very much to his courage in maintaining his integrity, when he not only hath an honest cause to plead, but by his wisdom knows how to manage it, and where to find *the interpretation of a thing*: *He shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with his enemy in the gate*.

2. A particular instance of wisdom pressed upon us, and that is, subjection to authority; and a dutiful and peaceable perseverance in our allegiance to the government which providence hath set over us. Observe,

(1.) How the duty of subjects is here described:

1. We must be observant of the laws. In all those things wherein the civil power is to interpose, whether legislative or judicial, we ought to submit to its order and constitutions. *I counsel thee*, it may as well be supplied, *I charge thee*, not only as a prince, but as a preacher, he might do both, I recommend it to thee as a piece of wisdom, I say, whatever those say that are given to charge, *keep the king's commandment*, wherever the sovereign power is lodged, be subject to it. *Observe the mouth of a king*, so the phrase is, say as he saith, do as he bids thee; let his word be a law, or rather, let the law be his word. Some understand the following clause as a limitation of this obedience; *keep the king's commandment*, yet so as to have a regard to the oath of God, i. e. so as to keep a good conscience, and not to violate thy obligations to God, which are prior and superior to thine obligations to the king. *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's*, but so as to reserve pure and entire to God, *the things that are his*.

2. We must not be forward to find fault with the publick administration, or quarrel with every thing that is not just according to our mind, nor quit our post of service under the government, and throw it up upon every discontent, ver. 3. *Be not hasty to go out of his sight*, when he is displeased at thee, chap. x. 4. or when thou art displeased at him; fly not off in a passion, nor entertain such jealousies of him, as will tempt thee to renounce the court, or forsake the kingdom. Solomon's subjects, as soon as his head was laid, went directly contrary to this rule, when, upon the rough answer which Rehobcam gave them, they were *hasty to go out of his sight*, would not take time for second thoughts, nor admit proposals of accommodation, but cried, *To your tents, O Israel*. There may, perhaps, be a just cause for to go out of his sight, but be not hasty to do it; act with great deliberation.

3. We must not persist in a fault when it is shewed us; *stand not in an evil thing*; in any offence thou hast given to thy prince, humble thy self, and do not justify thy self, for that will make the offence much more offensive: In any ill design thou hast, upon some discontent conceived against thy prince, do not proceed in it, but if thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thy self, or hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth, Prov. xxx. 32. Note, Though we may by surprize be drawn into an evil thing, yet we must not stand in it, but recede from it as soon as it appears to us to be evil.

4. We must prudently accommodate our selves to our opportunities, both for our own relief, if we think our selves wronged, and for the redress of publick grievances. *A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment*, ver. 5. i. e. it is the wisdom of subjects in applying themselves to their princes, to enquire and consider, both at what season, and in what manner they may do it best, and most effectually, to pacify his anger, obtain his favour, or obtain the revocation of any grievousness prescribed. Esther, in dealing with Ahasuerus, took a deal of pains to *discern both time and judgment*, and it sped accordingly. This may be taken as a general rule of wisdom, that every thing should be well-timed; and our enterprizes are then likely to succeed, when we nick the opportunity for them.

(2.) What arguments are here used to engage us to be subject to the higher powers; they are much the same with those which St. Paul useth, Rom. xiii. 1. &c.

1. *We must needs be subject for conscience sake*, and that is the most powerful principle of subjection; we must be subject, because of the oath of God, i. e. the oath of allegiance which we have taken to be faithful to the government; *the covenant between the king and the people*, 2 Chron. xxiii. 16. *David made a covenant or contract with the elders of Israel*, though he was king by divine designation, 1 Chron. xi. 3. *Keep the king's commandment*, for he hath sworn to rule thee in the fear of God, and thou hast sworn in that fear to be faithful to him. It is called *the oath of God*, because he is a witness to it, and will avenge the violation of it.

2. *For wrath's sake*; because of the sword which the prince bears, and the power he is intrusted with, which make him very formidable: *He doth whatsoever pleaseth him*, i. e. he hath a great authority, and a great ability to support that authority, ver. 4. *Where the word of a king is*, giving orders to seize a man, *there is power*,

power, there are enow that will execute his orders, which makes *the wrath of a king*, or supreme government, like *the roaring of a lion*, and like *messengers of death*; *who may say unto him, What dost thou?* i. e. he that contradicts him, it is at his peril: Kings will not bear to have their orders disputed, but expect they should be obeyed: In short, it is dangerous contending with sovereignty, and what many have repented. A subject is an unequal match for a prince: He may command me, that has legions at command.

3. For the sake of our own comfort. *Who so keepeth the commandment*, and lives a quiet and peaceable life, he shall feel no evil thing; to which that of the apostle answers, *Rom. xiii. 4. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power of the king?* Do that which is good, as becomes a dutiful and loyal subject, and thou shalt ordinarily have praise of the same. He that doth no ill shall feel no ill, and needs fear none.

6. ¶ Because to every purpose there is time, and judgment; therefore the misery of man is great upon him. 7. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? 8. *There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war, neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.*

Solomon had said, *ver. 5. that a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment*, i. e. a man's wisdom will go a great way by the blessing of God in moral prognostications; but here he shews, that few have that wisdom, and that even the wisest may yet be surprized by a calamity which they had not any foresight of, and therefore it is our wisdom to expect and prepare for sudden changes. Observe,

1. All the events concerning us, with the exact time of them, are determined and appointed in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, and all in wisdom. *To every purpose there is a time* prefixed, and it is the best time, for it is *time and judgment*, time appointed both in wisdom and righteousness, the appointment is not chargeable with folly or iniquity.

2. We are very much in the dark concerning future events, and the time and season of them. *Man knows not that which shall be himself, and who can tell him when, or how it shall be?* *ver. 7.* It cannot either be foreseen by him, or foretold to him; the stars cannot foretel a man what shall be; nor any of the arts of divination; God hath in wisdom concealed from us the knowledge of future events, that we may be always ready for changes.

3. It is our great unhappiness and misery, that, because we cannot foresee an evil, we know not how to avoid it, or guard against it; and because we are not aware of the proper successful season of actions, therefore we lose our opportunities, and miss our way. *Because to every purpose there is but one way, one method, one proper opportunity, therefore the misery of man is great upon him*, because it is so hard to hit that, and it is a thousand to one but he misseth it. Most of the miseries men labour under had been prevented, if they could have been foreseen, and the happy time discovered to avoid them: Men are miserable, because they do not look to their hits.

4. Whatever other evils may be avoided, we are all under a fatal necessity of dying, *ver. 8.*

1. When the soul is required it must be resigned, and it is to no purpose to dispute it, either by arms or arguments; not our selves, or any friend we have for us: *There is no man that has power over his own spirit, to retain it*, when it is summoned to return to God who gave it: It cannot fly any where out of the jurisdiction of death, nor find any place where its writs do not run: It cannot abscond, so as to escape death's eye, though it is hid from the eyes of all living: A man has no power to adjourn the day of his death, nor can he by prayers or bribes obtain a reprieve; no bail will be taken, no effoin, protection, or imparlance allowed. We have not power over the spirit of a friend, to retain that; the prince with all his authority cannot prolong the life of the most valuable of his subjects, nor the physician with his medicines and methods, nor the soldier with his force, nor the orator with his eloquence, nor the best faint with his intercessions: The stroke of death can by no means be put by, when our days are determined, and the hour appointed us is come.

2. Death is an enemy that we must all enter the lists with, sooner or later, *there is no discharge in that war*, that is, no dismission from it, either of the men of business, or of the faint-hearted, as there was among the Jews, *Deut. xx. 5, 8.* While we live we are struggling with death, and we shall never put off the harness till we put off the body, never obtain a discharge till death has obtained the mastery; the youngest is not released as a fresh-water soldier, nor the oldest as *miles emeritus*. Death is a battle that must be fought, *there is no sending to that war*, so some read it; no substituting another to muster for us, no champion admitted to fight for us; we must our selves engage, and are concerned to provide accordingly, as for a battle.

3. Mens wickedness, by which they often evade or outface the

justice of the prince, cannot secure them from the arrests of death; nor can the most obstinate sinner harden his heart against those terrors: Though he *strengthen himself* never so much in his wickedness, *Psal. lli. 7.* death will be too strong for him; the most subtil wickedness cannot outwit death, nor the most impudent wickedness outbrave death: Nay, the wickedness which men give themselves to, will be so far from delivering them from death, that it will deliver them up to death.

9. All this I have seen; and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: *there is a time* wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. 10. And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this is also vanity. 11. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily; therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. 12. ¶ Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: 13. But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

Solomon, in the beginning of the chapter, had warned us against having any thing to do with seditious subjects, here, in these verses, he encourageth us in reference to the mischief of tyrannical and oppressive rulers, such as he had complained of before; *chap. iii. 16. iv. 1.*

1. He had observed many such rulers, *ver. 9.* In the serious views and reviews he had taken of the children of men, and their state, he had observed, that many a time *one man rules over another to his hurt*; that is, 1. To the hurt of the ruled, many understand it so; whereas they ought to be God's ministers unto their subjects for their good, *Rom. xiii. 4.* to administer justice, and to preserve the publick peace and order; they use their power for their hurt, to invade their property, encroach upon their liberty, and to patronize the acts of injustice. It is sad with a people, when those that should protect their religion and rights, aim at the destruction of both. 2. To the hurt of the rulers, so we render it; *to their own hurt*; to the feeding of their pride and covetousness, the gratifying of their passion and revenge, and so to the filling up of the measure of their sins, and the hastening and aggravating of their ruin: What hurt men do to others, will return in the end to their own hurt: *Agens agendo repetitur*.

2. He had observed them to prosper and flourish in the abuse of their power, *ver. 10.* I saw those wicked rulers come and go from the place of the holy; go in state to, and return in pomp from the place of judicature, which is called *the place of the holy One*, because *the judgment is the Lord's*, *Deut. i. 17.* and he judgeth among the gods, *Psal. lxxxii. 1.* and is with them in the judgment, *2 Chron. xix. 6.* and they continued all their days in office, were never reckoned with for their male-administration, but died in honour, and were buried magnificently; their commissions were *durante vita*, and not *quam diu se bene gesserint*; and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done; their wicked practices were not remembered against them to their reproach and infamy when they were gone. Or rather, it notes the vanity of their dignity and power, for that is his remark upon it, in the close of the verse, *This is also vanity*: They are proud of their wealth and power, and honour, because they sit in *the place of the holy*, but all this cannot secure, 1. Their bodies from being buried in the dust: I saw them laid in the grave, and their pomp, though it attended them thither, could not descend after them, *Psal. xlix. 17.* 2. Nor their names from being buried in oblivion, for they were forgotten, as if they had never been.

3. He had observed that their posterity hardened them in their wickedness, *ver. 11.* It is true of all sinners in general; and particularly of wicked rulers, that, *because sentence against their evil works is not executed speedily*, they think it will never be executed, and therefore they set the law at defiance, and *their hearts are full in them to do evil*, they venture to do so much the more mischief, fetch a greater compass in their wicked designs, and are secure and fearless in it, and commit iniquity with a high hand. Observe, 1. Sentence is past against evil works, and evil workers, by the righteous Judge of heaven and earth, even against the evil works of princes and great men, as well as of inferior persons. 2. The execution of this sentence is oftentimes delayed a great while, and the sinner goes on, not only unpunished, but prosperous and successful. 3. Impunity hardens sinners in impiety, and the patience of God is shamefully abused by many, who, instead of being led by it to repentance, are confirmed by it in their impenitency. 4. Sinners herein deceive themselves, for though the sentence be not executed speedily, it will be executed the more severely at last: Vengeance comes slowly, but it comes surely; and wrath is in the mean time treasured up against the day of wrath.

4. He

4. He foresaw such an end of all these things, as would be sufficient to keep us from quarrelling with the divine providence upon account of them. He supposeth a wicked ruler to do an unjust thing *a hundred times*, and that yet his punishment is deferred, and God's patience towards him *is prolonged*, much beyond what was expected, and the days of his power are lengthened out, so that he continues to oppress, yet be not discouraged;

(1.) God's people are certainly a happy people, though they be oppressed; *it shall be well with them that fear God*, I say, with all them, and them only, *which fear before him*. Note, 1. It is the character of God's people, that they *fear God*, have an awe of him upon their hearts, and make conscience of their duty to him; and this, because they see his eye always upon them, and they know it is their concern to approve themselves to him: When they lie at the mercy of proud oppressors, they fear God more than they fear them: They do not quarrel with the providence of God, but submit to it. 2. It is the happiness of all *that fear God*, that, in the worst of times, *it shall be well with them*; their happiness in God's favour cannot be prejudiced, nor their communion with God interrupted by their troubles; they are in a good case, for they are kept in a good frame under their troubles, and in the end they shall have a blessed deliverance from, and an abundant recompence for their troubles: And therefore, *surely I know*, I know it by the promise of God, and the experience of all the saints, *that*, however it goes with others, *it shall go well with them*. All is well that ends well.

(2.) Wicked people are certainly a miserable people; though they prosper and prevail for a time, the curse is as sure to them as the blessing is to the righteous: *It shall not be well with the wicked*, as others think it is, who judge by outward appearance, and as they themselves expect it will be; nay, *wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with them*, Isa. iii. 10, 11. they shall be reckoned with for all the ill they have done; nothing that befalls them shall be really well for them. *Nihil potest ad malos pervenire quod proficit, imo nihil quod non noceat*. Seneca. Note, 1. The wicked man's days are *as a shadow*, not only uncertain and declining, as all men's days are, but altogether unprofitable. A good man's days have some substance in them, he lives to good purpose; a wicked man's days are all *as a shadow*, empty and worthless. 2. These days *shall not be prolonged* to what he promised himself; he *shall not live out half his days*, Psalm lv. 23. Though they may be prolonged, ver. 12. beyond what others expected, yet his day shall come to fall: He shall fall short of everlasting life, and then his long life on earth will be worth little. 3. God's great quarrel with wicked people is for their *not fearing before him*; that is at the bottom of their wickedness, and cuts them off from all happiness.

14. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just *men* unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked *men* to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said, that this also *is* vanity. 15. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour, the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun. 16. ¶ When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also *there is that* neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes.) 17. Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek *it* out, yet he shall not find *it*; yea, further, though a wise *man* think to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to find *it*.

Wise and good men have of old been perplexed with this difficulty, how the prosperity of the wicked, and the troubles of the righteous can be reconciled with the holiness and goodness of the God that governs the world; concerning this, Solomon here gives us his advice.

1. He would not have us to be surprized at it, as though some strange thing happened, for he himself saw it in his days, ver. 14. (1.) He saw *just men*, to whom it happened according to the work of the wicked, who, notwithstanding their righteousness, suffered very hard things, and continued long to do so, as if they were to be punished for some great wickedness. (2.) He saw *wicked men*, to whom it happened according to the work of the righteous, who prospered as remarkably as if they had been rewarded for some good deed; and these from themselves, from God, from men. We see the just troubled and perplexed in their own minds, the wicked easy, fearless, and secure; the just crossed and afflicted by the divine providence, the wicked prosperous, successful, and smiled upon; the just censured and reproached, and run down by the higher powers, the wicked applauded and preferred.

2. He would have us to take occasion from hence, not to charge God with iniquity, but to charge the world with vanity: No fault

is to be found with God, but as to the world, this *is* vanity upon the earth, and again, *this is also* vanity, i. e. it is a certain evidence that the things of this world are not the best things, nor were ever designed to make a portion and happiness for us, for if they had, God would not have allotted so much of this world's wealth to his worst enemies, and so much of its troubles to his best friends; there must therefore be another life after this, the joys and griefs of which must be real and substantial, and able to make men truly happy, and truly miserable, for this world doth neither.

3. He would have us not to fret and perplex our selves about it, or make our selves uneasy, but cheerfully to enjoy what God hath given us in the world, to be content with it, and make the best of it, though it be much better with others, and such as we think very unworthy, ver. 15. *Then I commended joy*, a holy security and serenity of mind, arising from a confidence in God and his power, providence and promise, *because a man hath no better thing under the sun* (though a good man has much better things above the sun) *than to eat and drink*, that is, soberly and thankfully to make use of the things of this life according as his rank is, *and to be cheerful*, whatever happens, *for that shall abide with him of his labour*, that is all the fruit he hath for himself of the pains that he takes in the business of the world, let him therefore take it, and much good may it do him; and let him not deny himself that, out of a peevish discontent, because the world doth not go as he would have it; *that shall abide with him*, during the days of his life, *which God giveth him under the sun*. Our present life is a life *under the sun*, but we look for the life of the world to come, which will commence and continue when the sun shall be turned into darkness, and shine no more. This present life must be reckoned by days; this life is given us, and the days of it allotted to us by the counsel of God, and therefore, while it doth last, we must accommodate our selves to the will of God, and study to answer the ends of life.

4. He would not have us undertake to give a reason for that which God doth, for *his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters*, past finding out, and therefore we must be contentedly and piously ignorant of the meaning of God's proceedings in the government of the world, ver. 16, 17. Here he shews,

(1.) That both he himself, and many others, had very closely studied the point, and searched far into the reasons of the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous; he, for his part, had *applied his heart to know this wisdom, and to see the business that is done*, by the divine providence, upon the earth, to find out if there were any certain scheme, any constant rule or method, by which the affairs of this lower world were administered, any course of government as sure and steady as the course of nature, so that by what is done now, we might as certainly foretel what will be done next, as by the moon's changing now, we can foretel when it will be at the full: This he would fain have found out. Others likewise had set themselves to make this enquiry, with so close an application, that they could not find time for sleep, *either day or night*, nor find in their hearts to sleep, so full of anxiety were they about these things! Some think Solomon speaks of himself, that he was so eager in prosecuting this great enquiry, that he could not sleep for thinking of it.

(2.) That it was all labour in vain, ver. 17. When we look upon all the works of God, and his providence, and compare one part with another, we cannot find that there is any such certain method by which the work that is done under the sun is directed, we cannot discover any key by which to decypher the character, nor by consulting precedents can we know the practice of this court, nor what the judgment will be. 1. *Though a man be never so industrious, though he labour to seek it out*; 2. *Though he be never so ingenious, though he be a wise man in other things, and can fathom the counsels of kings themselves, and trace them by their footsteps*; nay, 3. *Though he be very confident of success, though he think to know it, yet he shall not, he cannot find it out*: God's ways are above ours, nor is he tied to his own former ways, but *his judgments are a great deep*.

CHAP IX.

Solomon, in this chapter, for a further proof of the vanity of this world, gives us four observations which he had made upon a survey of the state of the children of men in it. 1. He observed, that commonly, as to outward things, good and bad men fare much alike, ver. 1,—3. 2. That death puts a final period to all our employments and enjoyments in this world, ver. 4,—6. from whence he infers, that it is our wisdom to enjoy the comforts of life, and mind the business of life while it doth last, ver. 7,—10. 3. That God's providence often crosseth the fairest and most hopeful probabilities of mens endeavour, and great calamities often surprize men ere they are aware, ver. 11, 12. 4. That wisdom often makes men very useful, and yet gains them little respect, but persons of great merit are slighted, ver. 13,—18. And what is there then in this world that should make us fond of it?

1. **F**OR all this I considered in my heart, even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and

and their works *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love, or hatred; *by all that is* before them. 2. All things come alike to all; *there is one event* to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean; and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the finner; and he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath. 3. This *is* an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that *there is one event* unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil; and madness *is* in their heart while they live; and after that, *they go* to the dead.

It has been observed, concerning those who have pretended to search for the philosopher's stone; that, though they could never find what they sought for, yet, in the search, they have hit upon many other useful discoveries and experiments: Thus Solomon, when, in the close of the foregoing chapter, he *applied his heart to know the work of God*, and took a great deal of pains to search into it, though he despaired of finding it out, yet he found out that which abundantly recompensed him for the search; and gave him some satisfaction, which here he gives us; *for therefore he considered all this in his heart*, and weighed it deliberately, that he might declare it for the good of others. Note, What we are to declare, we should first consider, think twice before we speak once; and what we have considered we should then declare: *I believed, therefore have I spoken*.

The great difficulty which Solomon met with in studying the book of providence, was the little difference that is made between good men and bad, in the distribution of comforts and crosses, and the disposal of events; this has perplexed the minds of many wise and contemplative men; Solomon discourseth of it in these verses, and though he doth not undertake to find out this *work of God*, yet he saith that which may prevent its being a stumbling-block to us.

1. Before he describes the temptation in its strength, he lays down a great and unquestionable truth, which he resolves to stick to, and which, if firmly believed, will be sufficient to break the force of the temptation: This has been the way of God's people in grappling with this difficulty. Job, before he discourseth of this matter, lays down the doctrine of God's omniscience, *Job xxiv.*

1. Jeremiah; the doctrine of his righteousness, *Jer. xii. 1.* Another prophet; that of his holiness, *Hab. i. 13.* The psalmist, that of his goodness; and peculiar favour to his own people, *Psal. lxxiii. 1.* and that is it which Solomon here fastens upon, and resolves to abide by; that though good and evil seem to be dispensed promiscuously; yet God has a particular care of, and concern for his own people; *The righteous and the wise, and their works are in the hand of God*, under his special protection and conduct; all their affairs are managed by him for their good; all their wise and righteous actions *are in his hand*, to be recompensed in the other world, though not in this. They seem as if they were given up *into the hand of their enemies*, but it is not so; men have *no power against them*, but *what is given them from above*; the events concerning them do not come to pass by chance, but all according to the will and counsel of God, which will turn that to be for them, which seemed to be most against them: Let this make us easy, whatever happens; that all God's saints are in his hand, *Deut. xxxiii. 3. John x. 29. Psalm xxxi. 15.*

2. He lays this down for a rule, that the love and hatred of God is not to be measured and judged of by men's outward condition. If prosperity were a certain sign of God's love, and affliction of his hatred; then it might justly be an offence to us to see the wicked and godly fare alike. But the matter is not so; *no man knows either love, or hatred, by all that is before them* in this world, by those things that are the objects of sense. These we may know by that which is within us; if we love God with all our heart, thereby we may know that he loves us; as we may know likewise that we are under his wrath, if we be governed by that carnal mind which is enmity to him; these will be known by that which shall be hereafter, by men's everlasting state; it is certain men are happy or miserable, according as they are under the love or hatred of God, but not according as they are under smiles or frowns of the world; and therefore, if God love a righteous man, as certainly he doth, he is happy, though the world frown upon him; and if he hate a wicked man, as certainly he doth, he is miserable, though the world smile upon him; then is the offence of this promiscuous distribution of events ceased.

3. Having laid down these principles, he acknowledgeth; that *all things come alike to all*; so it has been formerly, and therefore we are not to think it strange if it be so now, if it be so with us and our families. Some make this, and all that follows, to *ver. 13.* to be the perverse reasonings of the atheists against the doctrine of God's providence, but I rather take it to be Solomon's concession, which he might the more freely make, when he had fixed those truths which are sufficient to guard against any ill use that may be made of what he grants: Observe here, *ver. 2.*

(1.) The great difference that there is between the characters of the righteous and the wicked, which, in several instances, are set the one over against the other, to shew, that though *all things come alike to all*, yet that doth not in the least confound the eternal distinction between moral good and evil, but that remains immutable. 1. The righteous are *clean*, have *clean hands*, and *pure hearts*; the wicked are *unclean*, under the dominion of unclean lusts, *pure*, perhaps, in their own eyes, but not *cleansed from their filthiness*. God will certainly put a difference *between the clean and the unclean, the precious and the vile*, in the other world, though he doth not seem to do so in this. 2. The righteous sacrifice, i. e. they make conscience of worshipping God according to his will; both with inward and outward worship; the wicked sacrifice not; they live in the neglect of God's worship, and grudge to part with any thing for his honour: *What is the Almighty that they should serve him?* 3. The righteous are *good*, good in God's sight; they do good in the world; the wicked are *sinners*, violating the laws of God and man, and provoking to both. 4. The wicked man swears, has no veneration for the name of God, but profanes it by swearing rashly, and swearing falsely, but the righteous man fears an oath, swears not, but is sworn, and then with great reverence; he fears to take an oath, because it is a solemn appeal to God, as a witness and judge; he fears, when he has taken an oath, to break it, because God is righteous who taketh vengeance.

(2.) The little difference there is between the conditions of the righteous and the wicked in this world; *there is one event* to both: Is David rich? so is Nabal: Is Joseph favoured by his prince? so is Haman: One bad event: Is Ahab killed in a battle? so is Josiah: Are the bad figs carried to Babylon? so are the good; *Jer. xxiv. 1.* There is a vast difference between the original, the design, and the nature of the same event to the one and to the other; the effects and issues of them are likewise vastly different; the same providence to the one is *a saviour of life unto life*, to the other *of death unto death*, though to outward appearance it is the same.

4. He owns this to be a very great grievance to those that are wise and good. *This is an evil*, the greatest perplexity; *among all things that are done under the sun*, *ver. 3.* nothing has given me more disturbance than this, *that there is one event unto all*: It hardens atheists, and strengthens the hands of evil doers; for therefore it is that *the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil*, and *fully set in them to do evil*, chap. viii. 11. When they see that *there is one event to the righteous and the wicked*, they wickedly infer from thence, that it is all one to God, whether they are righteous or wicked, and therefore they stick at nothing to gratify their lusts.

5. For the further clearing of this great difficulty, as he began this discourse with the doctrine of the happiness of the righteous, whatever they may suffer, *they and their works are in the hands of God*, and therefore in good hands, they could not be in better; so he concludes with the doctrine of the misery of the wicked, however they may prosper; *madness is in their heart while they live; and after that they go to the dead*. Envy not the prosperity of evil doers, for, (1.) They are now madmen, and all the delights they seem to be blessed with are but like the pleasant dreams and fancies of a distracted man. They are *mad upon their idols*, *Jer. 1. 28.* are mad against God's people, *Acts xxvi. 11.* When the prodigal repented, it is said *he came to himself*, *Luke xv. 17.* which intimates, that he had been beside himself before. (2.) They will shortly be dead men. They make a mighty noise and bustle *while they live*, but after a while *they go to the dead*, and there is an end of all their pomp and power; they will then be reckoned with for all their madness, and outrage in sin. Though on this side death the righteous and the wicked seem alike, on the other side death there will be a vast difference between them.

4. ¶ For to him that is joined to all the living; there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

5. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. 6. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. 7. ¶ Go thy way; eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. 8. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. 9. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest, all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. 10. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for *there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest*.

Solomon, in a fret, had *praised the dead more than the living*, chap. iv. 2. but here, considering the advantages of life to prepare

for death, and make sure the hope of a better life, he seems to be of another mind.

(1.) He shews the advantages which the living have above those that are dead, *ver.* 4, 5, 6.

1. While there is life *there is hope. Dum spiro, spero.* It is the privilege of the living that they are *joined to the living*, in relation, commerce, and conversation, and while they are so, *there is hope*: If a man's condition be upon any account bad, *there is hope* it will be amended; if *the heart be full of evil, and madness be in it*, yet, while there is life, *there is hope*, that, by the grace of God, there may be a blessed change wrought, but after men *go to the dead*, *ver.* 3. it is too late then; he that is then filthy, will be filthy still, for ever filthy. If men be thrown aside as useless, yet, while they are *joined to the living*, *there is hope*, that they may yet again take root, and bear fruit; he that is alive is, or may be good for something, but he that is dead, as to this world, is not capable of being any further serviceable; therefore *a living dog is better than a dead lion*, i. e. the meanest beggar alive has that comfort of this world, and doth that service to it, which the greatest prince, when he is dead, is utterly incapable of.

2. While there is life there is an opportunity of preparing for death. *The living know* that which the dead have no knowledge of, particularly they *know that they shall die*, and are, or may be, thereby influenced to prepare for that great change which will come certainly, and may come suddenly. Note, *The living* cannot but *know that they shall die*, that they must needs die; they know they are under a sentence of death; they are already taken into custody of its messengers, and feel themselves declining: This is a needful, useful knowledge; for what is our business while we live, but to get ready to die? *The living know they shall die*, it is a thing yet to come, and therefore provision may be made for it; *the dead know* they are dead, and it is too late, they are on the other side the great gulf fixed.

3. When life is gone, all this world is gone with it as to us.

(1.) There is an end of all our acquaintance with this world, and the things of it; *the dead know not any thing* of that, which, while they lived, they were intimately conversant with: It doth not appear that they know any thing of what is done by those they leave behind. Abraham is ignorant of us, they are removed *into darkness*, Job x. 22. (2.) There is an end of all our enjoyments in this world: *They have no more a reward* for their toils about the world, but all they got must be left to others; they have a reward for their holy actions, but not for their worldly ones; the meats and the belly will be destroyed together, *John vi.* 27. *1 Cor.* vi. 13. It is explained, *ver.* 6. *Neither have they any more a portion for ever*, none of that which they imagined would be *a portion for ever*, of that which *is done*, and got *under the sun*. The things of this world will not be a portion for the soul, because they will not be a portion for ever; they that choose them, and have them for their good things, have only *a portion in this life*, Psalm xvii. 14. The world can only be an annuity for life, not *a portion for ever*.

(3.) There is an end of their name; there are but few whose names survive them long, the grave is a land of forgetfulness, *for the memory of them that are laid there is soon forgotten*; their *place knows them no more*, nor the lands they called by their own names.

(4.) There is an end of their affections, their friendships and enmities: *Their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished*; the good things they loved, the evil things they hated, the prosperity of others which they envied, are now all at an end with them: Death parts those that loved one another, and puts an end to their friendship; and those that hated one another too, and puts an end to their quarrels. *Actio moritur cum persona*. There we shall be never the better for our friends, their love can do us no kindness, nor ever the worse for our enemies, their hatred and envy can do us no damage. *There the wicked cease from troubling*. Those things which now so affect us, and fill us, which we are so concerned about, and so jealous of, will there be at an end.

(2.) From hence he infers, that it is our wisdom to make the best use of life that we can, while it doth last, and manage wisely what remains of it.

1. Let us relish the comfort of life while we live, and cheerfully take our share of the enjoyments of it. Solomon, having been himself ensnared by the abuse of sensitive delights, warns others of the danger, not only by a total prohibition of them, but by directing to the sober and moderate use of them; we may use the world, but must not abuse it; take what is to be had out of it, and expect no more.

Here is, (1.) The particular instances of this cheerfulness prescribed. Thou that art drooping and melancholy, *go thy way*, like a fool as thou art, and get into a better temper of mind.

1. Let thy spirit be easy and pleasant, then let there be joy, and a merry heart within; *a good heart*, so the word is; which distinguisheth this from carnal mirth, and sensual pleasure, which is the evil of the heart, both a symptom and a cause of much evil there; we must enjoy our selves, enjoy our friends, enjoy our God, and be careful to keep a good conscience, that nothing may disturb us in these enjoyments: We must serve God with gladness in the use of what he gives us, and be liberal in communicating of it to others, and not suffer our selves to be oppressed with inordinate care and

grief about the world. We must eat our bread as Israelites, *not in our mourning*, Deut. xxvi. 11. as christians, *with gladness*, and liberality of heart, Acts ii. 46. See Deut. xxviii. 47.

2. Make use of the comforts and enjoyments which God hath given thee; *eat thy bread, drink thy wine*, thine, not another's; not *the bread of deceit*, or *the wine of violence*, but that which is honestly got, else thou canst not eat it with any comfort, nor expect a blessing upon it. *Thy bread, and thy wine*, i. e. such as is agreeable to thy place and station, not extravagantly above it, nor sordidly below it; lay out what God has given thee for the ends for which thou art entrusted with it, as being but a steward.

3. Evidence thy cheerfulness, *ver.* 8. *Let thy garments be always white*; observe a proportion in thine expences, and let the back and the belly each have their just share; pinch not thy belly to feed thy pride, as some do; nor starve thy back to indulge thy luxury, as others do: Be neat, wear clean linen, and be not slovenly. Or, *Let thy garments be white*, in token of joy and cheerfulness, which was expressed by *white raiment*, Rev. iii. 4. and, as a further token of joy, *let thy head lack no ointment* that is fit for it; our Saviour admitted this piece of pleasure at a feast, *Matt.* xxvi. 7. and David observes it among the gifts of God's bounty to him, *Psal.* xxiii. 5. *Thou anointest my head with oil*: Not that we must place our happiness in any of the delights of sense, or set our hearts upon them, but what God has given us we must make a comfortable use of, as we can afford, under the limitations of sobriety and wisdom, and not forgetting the poor.

4. Make thy self agreeable to thy relations; *live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest*; do not engross thy delights, making much of thy self only, and not caring what becomes of those about thee, but let them share with thee, and make them easy too. Have a wife; for even in paradise *it was not good for man to be alone*. Keep to thy wife, to one, and do not multiply wives; Solomon had found the mischief of that; to her only; and have nothing to do with any other: How can a man live joyfully with one with whom he doth not live honestly? Love thy wife; and *the wife whom thou lovest* thou wilt be likely to *live joyfully with*: When we do the duty of relations, we may expect the comfort of them. See *Prov.* v. 19. Live with thy wife, and delight in her society; *live joyfully with her*, and be most merry when thou art with her: Take pleasure in thy family, thy vine, and thine olive plants.

(2.) The qualification necessary to this cheerfulness: Rejoice, and have a merry heart, if *God now accepteth thy works*: If thou art reconciled to God, and recommended to him, then thou hast reason to be cheerful, otherwise not: *Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people, for thou hast gone a whoring from thy God*, Hos. ix. 1. Our first care must be to make our peace with God, and obtain his favour, to do that which he will accept of, and then, *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy*. Note, Those whose works God has accepted, have reason to be cheerful, and ought to be so. Now thou eatest the bread of thy sacrifices *with joy*, and partakest of the wine of thy drink-offerings *with a merry heart*, now *God accepteth thy works*; thy religious services, when performed with holy joy, are pleasing to God; he loves to have his servants sing at their work, it proclaims him a good master.

(3.) The reasons for it. Live joyfully, for,

1. It is all little enough to make thy passage through this world easy and comfortable. *The days of thy life* are the days of *thy vanity*, there is nothing here but trouble and disappointment, thou wilt have time enough for sorrow and grief when thou canst not help it, and therefore *live joyfully* while thou canst, and perplex not thy self with thoughts and cares about to morrow, *sufficient to the day is the evil thereof*. Let a gracious serenity of mind be a powerful antidote against the vanity of the world.

2. It is all thou canst get from this world, *that is thy portion in the things of this life*; in God, and another life, thou shalt have a better portion, and a better recompence for thy labours in religion, but for thy pains *which thou takest* about the things *under the sun*, this is all thou canst expect, and therefore do not deny this to thy self.

2. Let us apply our selves to the business of life, while life lasts, and so use the enjoyments of it, as by them to be fitted for the employments; therefore *eat with joy, and a merry heart*, not that thy soul may take its ease, as *Luke* xii. 19. but that thy soul may take the more pains, and the joy of the Lord may be its strength, and oil to its wheels, *ver.* 10. *Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might*. Observe here, 1. That there is not only something to be had, but something to be done in this life, and the chief good we are to enquire after, is the *good we should do*, Eccl. ii. 3. This is the world of service, that to come is the world of recompence; this is the world of probation and preparation for eternity, we are here upon business, and upon our behaviour. 2. That opportunity is to direct and quicken duty; that is to be done which *our hand finds to do*, which occasion calls for; and an active hand will always find something to do that will turn to a good account. What must be done of necessity, our hand will here find a price in it for the doing of, *Prov.* xvii. 16. 3. That what good we have an opportunity of doing, we must do while we have the opportunity, and *do it with our might*, with care and vigour, and resolution, whatever difficulties and discouragements we may meet with in it.

it. Harvest days are busy days; and we must make hay while the sun shines. Serving God, and working out our salvation, must be done with *all that is within us*, and all little enough. 4. There is good reason why we should *work the works of him that sent us while it is day, because the night comes wherein no man can work*, John ix. 4. We must up, and be doing now, with all possible diligence, because our doing-time will be done shortly, and we know not how soon: But this we know, that if the work of life be not done when our time is done, we are undone for ever. *There is no work to be done, nor device to do it, no knowledge for speculation, nor wisdom for practice, in the grave whither thou goest.* We are all going towards the grave, every day brings us a step nearer it; when we are *in the grave*, it will be too late to mend the errors of life; too late to repent, and make our peace with God; too late to lay up any thing in store for eternal life; it must be done now, or never. The grave is a land of darkness and silence, and therefore there is no doing any thing for our souls there, it must be done now, or never, *John xii. 35.*

11. ¶ I returned and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. 12. For man also knoweth not his time, as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

The preacher here, for a further proof of the vanity of the world, and to convince us, that *all our works are in the hand of God*, and not in our own hand, shews the uncertainty and contingency of future events, and how often they contradict the prospects we have of them. He had exhorted us, *ver. 10.* to do what we have to do *with all our might*, but here he minds us, that when we have done all, we must leave the issue with God, and not be confident of the success.

1. We are often disappointed of the good we had great hopes of, *ver. 11.* Solomon had himself made the observation, and so has many a one since, that events, both in publick and private affairs, do not always agree even with the most rational prospects and probabilities that there were of them. *Nulli fortuna tam dedita est, ut multa tentanti ubique respondeat.* Seneca. The issue of affairs is oftentimes unaccountably cross to every one's expectation, that the highest may not presume, nor the lowest despair, but all may live in an humble dependence upon God, from whom every man's judgment proceeds.

(1.) He gives instances of disappointment, even there where means and instruments were most encouraging, and promised fair.

1. One would think that the lightest of foot should in running win the prize, and yet *the race is not always to the swift*, some accident happens to retard them, or they are too secure, and therefore remiss, and let those that are slower get the start of them.

2. One would think that in fighting the most numerous and puissant army should be always victorious, and in single combat, that the bold and mighty champion should win the laurel, but *the battle is not always to the strong*, an host of Philistines was once put to flight by Jonathan and his man; *one of you shall chase a thousand*; the goodness of the cause has many a time carried the day against the most formidable power.

3. One would think that men of sense should always be men of substance, and that those that know how to live in the world, should not only have a plentiful maintenance, but get great estates, and yet it doth not always prove so, even *bread is not always to the wise*, much less *riches always to men of understanding*: Many ingenious men, and men of business, that were likely to thrive in the world, have strangely gone backward, and come to nothing.

4. One would think that those who understand men, and have the art of management, should always get preferment, and obtain the smiles of great men, but many ingenious men have been balked, and have spent their days in obscurity, nay, have fallen into disgrace, and, perhaps, have ruined themselves by those very methods by which they hoped to have raised themselves, for *favour is not always to men of skill*, but fools are favoured, and wise men frowned upon.

(2.) He resolves all these disappointments into an over-ruling power and providence, the disposals of which to us seem casual, and we call them *chance*, but really they are according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, here called *time*, in the language of this book, *chap. iii. 1. Psalm xxxi. 15. Time and chance happens to them all*: A sovereign providence breaks mens measures, and blasts their hopes, and teacheth them, that the way of man is not in himself, but subject to the divine will. We must use means, but not trust to them; if we succeed, we must give God the praise, *Psalm xlv. 3. if we be crossed, we must acquiesce in his will, and take our lot.*

2. We are often surprised with the evils we were in little fear of, *ver. 12. Man knows not his time*, the time of his calamity, his fall, his death, which, in scripture, is called, *our day*, and *our hour*. (1.) We know not what troubles are before us, which will take us off our business, and take us out of the world, what *time and chance will happen to us*, nor what *one day*, or a night may bring forth: it is *not for us to know the times*, no, not our own time, when, or how we shall die: God has, in wisdom, kept us in the dark that we may be always ready. (2.) Perhaps we may meet with trouble in that very thing wherein we promise ourselves the greatest satisfaction and advantage: as the fishes and the birds are drawn into the snare and net by the bait that is laid to allure them, which they greedily catch at, so are the sons of men often *snared in an evil time*, when it falls suddenly upon them, before they are aware. And these things too *come alike to all*. Men often find their bane where they sought their bliss, and catch their death where they thought to have found a prize. Let us therefore never be secure, but always ready for changes, that though they may be sudden, they may be no surprise or terror to us.

13. ¶ This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: 14. *There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it*: 15. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. 16. Then said I, *Wisdom is better than strength*: nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard. 17. The words of wise men are heard in quiet, more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. 18. *Wisdom is better than weapons of war*: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

Solomon still recommends wisdom to us as necessary to the preserving of our peace, and the perfecting of our business; notwithstanding the vanities and crosses which human affairs are subject to. He had said, *ver. 11.* that *bread is not always to the wise*, yet he would not therefore be thought either to disparage, or to discourage wisdom, no; he still sticks to his principle, that *wisdom excels folly, as much as light excels darkness*, chap. ii. 13. and we ought to love and embrace it, and be governed by it, for the sake of its own intrinsic worth, and the capacity it gives us of being serviceable to others, though we ourselves should not get wealth and preferment by it. This wisdom, *i. e.* this which he here describes, wisdom which enables a man to serve his country, out of pure affection to its interests, when he himself gains no advantage by it, no not so much as thanks for his pains, or the reputation of it, this is the wisdom which Solomon saith *seemed great unto him*, *ver. 13.* A publick spirit in a private sphere is wisdom, which those who understand things that differ, cannot but look upon as very magnificent.

1. Solomon here gives an instance, which probably was a case in fact in some neighbouring country, of a *poor man* that, with his wisdom, did great service in a time of publick distress and danger; *ver. 14. There was a little city*, no great prize whoever was master of it, there were but *few men within it* to defend it, and men, if men of fortitude, are the best fortifications of a city; here were *few men*, and because few feeble and fearful, and ready to give up their city as not tenable. Against this little city a *great king* came with a numerous army and besieged it, either in pride or covetousness to possess it, or in revenge for some affront given him to chastise and destroy it; thinking it stronger than it was he *built great bulwarks against it*, from which to batter it, and doubted not in a little time to make himself master of it. What a great deal of unjust vexation do ambitious princes give to their harmless neighbours! This *great king* needed not fear this *little city*, what need he frighten it then? It would be little profit to him, why then should he put himself to such a great expence to gain it? But as unreasonably and insatiably greedy as little people sometimes are to *lay house to house, and field to field*, great kings often are to lay city to city, and province to province, *that they may be placed alone in the earth*, Isa. v. 8. Now, was the victory and success to the strong? No, there was found in this little city, among the few men that were in it *one poor wise man*; a wise man and yet poor, and not preferred to any place of profit, or power in the city; places of trust were not given to men according to their merit and meetness for them, else such a wise man as this had not been a poor man. Now,

1. Being wise he served the city, though he was poor, in their distress they found him out, *Judges xi. 7.* and begged his advice and assistance, and *he by his wisdom delivered the city*, either by prudent instructions given to the besieged, directing them to some unthought of stratagem for their own security, or by a prudent treaty with the besiegers, as the woman at Abel, *2 Sam. xx. 16.* He did not upbraid them with the contempt they had put upon him in leaving him out of their council, nor tell them he was poor and

and had nothing to lose, and therefore cared not what became of the city; but did his best for it, and was blessed with success. Note, Private interests and personal resentments must always be sacrificed to the publick good, and forgotten when the common welfare is concerned.

2. Being poor the city slighted him, though he was wise and had been an instrument to save them all from ruin, *no man remembered that same poor man*, his good services were not taken notice of, no recompence was made him, no marks of honour put upon him; but he lived in as much poverty and obscurity as he had done before; *riches were not to this man of understanding*, nor *favour to this man of skill*. Many that have well merited of their prince and country have been ill paid, such an ungrateful world do we live in. It is well useful men have a God to trust to, who will be their bountiful rewarder; for, among men, great services are often envied, and rewarded with evil for good.

2. From this instance he draws some useful inferences; looks upon it and receives instruction.

(1.) Hence he observes the great usefulness and excellency of wisdom, and what a blessing it makes men to their country: *Wisdom is better than strength*, ver. 16. A prudent mind, which is the honour of a man, is to be preferred before a robust body, in which many of the brute creatures excel man. A man may by his wisdom effect that which he could never compass by his strength; and may overcome those, by out-witting them, that are able to over-power him. Nay, *Wisdom is better than weapons of war*, offensive or defensive, ver. 18. *Wisdom*, that is, religion and piety (for the wise man is here opposed to a sinner) this is better than all military endowments or accoutrements, for it will engage God for us, and then we are safe in the greatest perils, and successful in the greatest enterprizes. *If God be for us, who can be against us*, or stand before us?

(2.) Hence he observes, the commanding force and power of wisdom, though it labour under external disadvantages, ver. 17. *The words of wise men are heard in quiet*, i. e. what they speak being rational and to the purpose, being spoken calmly and with deliberation; though not being rich and in authority, they dare not speak loud, nor with any great assurance, yet it will be hearkened to and regarded, will gain respect, nay, will gain the point, and sway with men more than the imperious clamours of him that *ruleth among fools*, who, like fools, chose him to be their ruler for his noise and blustering, and, like fools, think he must by those methods carry the day with every body else. A few close arguments are worth a great many big words: and those will strike fail to fair reasoning who will answer them that bounce and hector according to their folly. *How forcible are right words!* What is spoken wisely should be spoken calmly, and then it will be heard in quiet and calmly considered. But passion will lessen the force even of reason, instead of adding any force to it.

3. Hence he observes, that wise and good men, notwithstanding this, must often content themselves with the satisfaction of having done good, or at least endeavoured it, and offered at it when they cannot do the good they would do, nor have the praise they should have. Wisdom capacitates a man to serve his neighbours, and he offers his service; but, alas, if he be poor his wisdom is despised, and *his words are not heard*, ver. 16. Many a man is buried alive in poverty and obscurity, that if he had but fitting encouragement given him might be a great blessing to the world; many a pearl is lost in its shell. But there is a day coming when wisdom and goodness shall be in honour, and the *righteous shall shine forth*.

4. From what he had observed of the great good which one wise and virtuous man may do, he infers, what a great deal of mischief one wicked man may do, and what a great deal of good he may be the hindrance of: *One sinner destroyeth much good*, (1.) As to himself, a sinful condition is a wasteful condition: How many of the good gifts both of nature and providence doth one sinner destroy and make waste of! good sense, good parts, good learning, a good disposition, a good estate, good meat, good drink, and abundance of God's good creatures, all made use of in the service of sin, and so destroyed and lost, and the end of giving them frustrated and perverted. He that destroys his own soul destroys much good, (2.) As to others, what a great deal of mischief may one wicked man do in a town or country! one sinner that makes it his business to debauch others, may defeat and frustrate the intentions of a great many good laws, and a great deal of good preaching, and draw many into his pernicious ways: one sinner may be the ruine of a town, as one Achan troubled the whole camp of Israel. The wise man that delivered the city had had his due respect and recompence for it, but that some one sinner hindered it, and invidiously diminished the service. And many a good project well laid for the publick welfare, has been destroyed by some one subtil adversary to it. The wisdom of some would have healed the nation, but through the wickedness of a few it would not be healed. See who are a kingdom's friends and enemies, if one saint doth much good, and one sinner destroys much good.

C H A P. X.

This chapter seems to be like Solomon's proverbs, a collection of wise sayings and observations, rather than a part of his sermon; but the preacher studied to be sententious, and set in order many proverbs to be brought in in his preaching. Yet the general scope of all the observations in this chapter is to recommend wisdom to us, and its precepts and rules; as of great use for the right ordering of our conversation, and to caution us against folly. 1. He recommends wisdom to private persons that are in an inferior station. (1.) *It is our wisdom to preserve our reputation, in managing our affairs dexterously*, ver. 1, — 3. (2.) *To be submissive to our superiors, if at any time we have offended them*, ver. 4. (3.) *To live quiet and peaceable lives, and not to meddle with those that are factious and seditious, and are endeavouring to disturb the government and the publick repose. The folly and danger of which disloyal and turbulent practices he shews*, ver. 8, 9, 10, 11. (4.) *To govern our tongues well*, ver. 12, — 15. (5.) *To be diligent in our business, and provide well for our families*, ver. 18, 19. (6.) *Not to speak ill of our rulers, no, not in secret*, ver. 20. 2. He recommends wisdom to rulers; let them not think, that because their subjects must be quiet under them; therefore they may do what they please, no, but (1.) *Let them be careful whom they prefer to places of trust and power*, ver. 5, 6, 7. (2.) *Let them manage themselves discreetly, be generous, and not childish; temperate, and not luxurious*, ver. 16, 17. *And happy the nation when princes and people make conscience of their duty according to these rules.*

1. **D**EAD flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour. 2. A wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart is at his left. 3. Yea, also when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he faith to every one that he is a fool.

In these verses Solomon shews,

1. What great need wise men have to take heed of being guilty of any instance of folly; for a little folly is a great blemish to him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour, and is as hurtful to his good name as dead flies are to a sweet perfume, not only spoiling the sweetness of it, but making it to send forth a stinking savour. Note, 1. True wisdom is true honour, and will gain a man a reputation, which is like a box of precious ointment, pleasing and very valuable. 2. The reputation that is hardly got, and by a great deal of wisdom, may be easily lost, and by a little folly; because envy fastens upon eminency, and makes the worst of the mistakes and miscarriages of those that are cried up for wisdom, and improves them to their disadvantage; so that the folly, which in another would not be taken notice of, in them is severely censured. Those that make a great profession of religion have need to walk very circumspectly, to abstain from all appearances of evil, and approaches towards it, because many eyes are upon them that watch for their halting, their character is soon sullied, and they have a great deal of reputation to lose.

2. What a deal of advantage a wise man has above a fool in the management of business, ver. 2. *A wise man's heart is at his right hand*, so that he goes about his business with dexterity, turns his hand readily to it, and goes through it with dispatch; his counsel and courage are ready to him whenever he has occasion for them; but a fool's heart is at his left hand, it is always to seek when he has any thing to do that is of importance, and therefore goes awkwardly about it, like a man that is left-handed, and is soon at a loss and at his wit's end.

3. How apt fools are, at every turn, to proclaim their own folly and expose themselves; he that is either witless or graceless, either silly or wicked, if he be never so little from under the check and left to himself, if he but walk by the way, soon shews what he is, his wisdom fails him, and by some indecent ill carriage or other, he faith to every one he meets that he is a fool, ver. 3. i. e. he discovers it as plainly as if he had told them so. He cannot conceal it, and he is not ashamed of it. Sin is the reproach of sinners wherever they go.

4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place: for yielding pacifieth great offences. 5. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error, which proceedeth from the ruler. 6. Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. 7. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. 8. He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. 9. Whoso removeth stones, shall be hurt therewith: and he that cleaveth wood, shall

shall be endangered thereby. 10. If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength : but wisdom is profitable to direct. 11. Surely, the serpent will bite without enchantment, and a babbler is no better.

The scope of these verses is to keep subjects loyal and dutiful to the government ; in Solomon's reign the people were very rich, and lived in prosperity, which, perhaps, made them proud and petulant, and when the taxes were high, though they had enough to pay them with, it is probable many carried it insolently towards the government, and threatened to rebel. To such Solomon here gives some necessary cautions.

1. Let not subjects carry on a quarrel with their prince upon any private personal disgust, *ver. 4. If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee*, if upon some misinformation given him, or some mismanagement of thine, he is displeased at thee and threatens thee, yet *leave not thy place*, forget not the duty of a subject, revolt not from thine allegiance, do not in a passion quit thy post in his service, and throw up thy commission, as despairing ever to regain his favour : No, wait a while and thou wilt find he is not implacable, but that *yielding pacifieth great offences*. Solomon speaks for himself, and for every wise and good man that is a master or a magistrate, that he could easily forgive those upon their submission, whom yet, upon their provocation, he had been very angry with. It is fairer and better to yield to an angry prince, than to contend with him.

2. Let not subjects commence a quarrel with their prince, though the publick administration be not in every thing as they would have it. He grants *there is an evil often seen under the sun*, and it is a king's-evil, an evil which the king only can cure, for *it is an error which proceedeth from the ruler*; *ver. 5. it is a mistake which rulers, consulting their personal affections more than the publick interests, are too often guilty of*, that men are not preferred according to their merit, but *folly is set in great dignity*, men of shattered brains and broken fortunes are put in places of power and trust, while the rich men, of good sense and good estates, whose interest would oblige them to be true to the publick, and whose abundance would be likely to set them above temptations to bribery and extortion, yet sit in low place and can get no preferment, *ver. 6. either the ruler knows not how to value them, or the terms of preferment are such as they cannot in conscience comply with*. It is ill with a people when vicious men are advanced, and men of worth are kept under hatches. This is illustrated, *ver. 7. I have seen servants upon horses*, men not so much of mean extraction and education, if that were all it were the more excusable; nay, there is many a wise servant, who, with good reason, *hath rule over a son that causeth shame*; but of sordid, servile, mercenary dispositions, I have seen these riding in pomp and state, as princes, while princes, men of noble birth and qualities, fit to rule a kingdom, have been forced to *walk as servants upon the earth*, poor and despised, and little regarded. Thus God, in his providence, punisheth a wicked people, but as far as it is the ruler's act and deed, it is certainly his error, and a great evil, a grievance to the subject, and very provoking; but it is *an error under the sun*, which will certainly be rectified *above the sun*, and when it shall shine no more, for in heaven it is only wisdom and holiness that is set in great dignity. But if the prince be guilty of his error, yet let not the subjects *leave their place*, nor rise up against the government, nor form any project for the alteration of it; nor let the prince carry on the humour too far, nor set such servants, such beggars on horseback, as will ride furiously over the ancient land-marks of the constitution, and threaten the subversion of it.

1. Let neither prince nor people violently attempt any changes, nor make a forcible entry upon a national settlement, for they will both find it of dangerous consequence; which he shews here by four similitudes, the scope of which is to give us a caution not to meddle to our own hurt. Let not princes invade the rights and liberties of their subjects; let not subjects mutiny and rebel against their princes; for, (1.) *He that digs a pit for another*, it is ten to one but he *falls into it himself*, and his violent dealing returns upon his own head. If princes become tyrants, or subjects become rebels, all histories will tell both what is like to be their fate, and that it is at their utmost peril, and it were better for both to be content within their own bounds. (2.) *Who so breaketh an hedge*, an old hedge, that has long been a land-mark, let him expect that a *serpent*, or *adder*, such as use to harbour in rotten hedges, will *bite him*; some viper or other will fasten upon his hand, *Acts xxviii. 3.* God, by his ordinance, as by a hedge, hath inclosed the prerogatives and powers of princes, their persons are under his special protection; those therefore that form any treasonable designs against their peace, their crown and dignity, are but twisting halters for themselves. (3.) *Who so removeth stones to pull down a wall, or building*, doth but pluck them upon himself, he shall be *hurt therewith*, and will wish that he had let them alone. Those that go about to alter a well modelled, well settled government, under colour of redressing some grievances, and correcting some amisses in it, will quickly perceive, not only, that it is easier to find fault

than mend, to demolish that which is good, than to build up that which is better, but that they thrust their own fingers into the fire, and pull an old house about their ears. (4.) *He that cleaveth wood*, especially if, as it follows, he hath sorry tools, *ver. 10. he shall be endangered thereby*, the chips will fly in his face, or his own axe-head. If we meet with knotty pieces of timber, men of perverse and ungovernable spirits, and we think to master them by force and violence, and hew them to pieces, they may not only prove too hard for us, but the attempt may turn to our own damage.

2. Rather let both prince and people carry it to each other with prudence, and mildness, and good temper; *Wisdom is profitable to direct* the ruler how to manage a people that are inclined to be turbulent; so as neither, on the one hand, by a supine negligence to embolden and encourage them, nor, on the other hand, by rigour and severity to exasperate and provoke them to any seditious practices. It is likewise profitable to direct the subjects how to carry themselves towards a prince that is inclined to bear hard upon them, so as not to alienate his affections from them; but to win upon him by humble remonstrances (not insolent demands, such as the people made upon Rehoboam) by patient submissions and peaceable expedients. The same rule is to be observed in all relations, for the preserving of the comfort of them; let wisdom direct to gentle methods; and forbear violent ones: Thus, one wise, and both happy.

1. Wisdom will teach us to whet the tool we are to make use of, rather than by leaving it blunt oblige ourselves to put to so much the *more strength*, *ver. 10.* We might save ourselves a great deal of labour, and prevent a great deal of danger, if we did whet before we cut, *i. e.* consider and premeditate what is fit to be said and done in every difficult case; that we may accommodate ourselves to it, and may do our work smoothly and easily, both to others and to ourselves. Wisdom will direct how to sharpen and put an edge upon both ourselves and those we employ, not to *work deceitfully*, *Psal. lii. 2.* but to work clean and cleverly. The mower loses no time when he is whetting his scythe.

2. Wisdom will teach us to enchant the serpent we are to contend with, rather than think to out-hiss it, *ver. 11. The serpent will bite* if he be not, by singing and musick, charmed and enchanted, against which therefore he *stops his ears*, *Psal. lviii. 4, 5. and a babbler is no better* to all those that enter the lists with him, who therefore must not think, by dint of words, to out-talk him, but by prudent management to enchant him. *He that is lord of the tongue*, so the phrase is, *i. e.* a ruler that has liberty of speech, and may say what he will, it is as dangerous dealing with him as with a serpent uncharmed; but if you use the enchantment of a mild and humble submission, you may be safe and out of danger; herein *wisdom*, the meekness of wisdom, *is profitable to direct*. *By long forbearing is a prince perswaded*, *Prov. xxv. 15.* Jacob enchanted Esau with a present, and Abigail, David. To those that may say any thing it is wisdom to say nothing that is provoking.

12. The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious: but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. 13. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the end of his talk is mischievous madness. 14. A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? 15. The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

Solomon having shewed the benefit of wisdom, and of what great advantage it is to us in the conduct of our affairs, here shews the mischief of folly, and how it exposeth men, which, perhaps, comes in as a reflection upon those rulers who *set folly in great dignity*.

1. Fools talk a great deal to no purpose, and they shew their folly as much by the multitude, impertinence, and mischievousness of their words as by any thing. Whereas *the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious*, are grace, manifest grace in his heart, and minister grace to the hearers, are good, and such as become him, and do good to all about him; *the lips of a fool* not only expose him to reproach and make him ridiculous, but *will swallow up himself* and bring him to ruin, by provoking the government to take cognizance of his seditious talk, and call him to an account for it. Adonijah foolishly *spoke against his own life*, *1 Kings ii. 23.* Many a man has been sunk, by having *his own tongue fall upon him*, *Psal. lxiv. 8.* See what a fool's talk is:

(1.) It takes rise from his own weakness and wickedness; *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness*, the foolishness bound up in his heart, that is the corrupt spring out of which all these polluted streams flow; the *evil treasure* out of which evil things are brought. As soon as he begins to speak you may perceive his folly, at the very first he talks idly, and passionately, and like himself.

(2.) It riseth up to fury, and tends to the hurt and injury of others: *The end of his talk*, the end it comes to is madness, he will presently talk himself into an indecent heat, and break out into the wild extravagancies of a distracted man; the end it aims at is mischief;

mischievous; as at first he appeared to have little government of himself, so at last it appears he has a great deal of malice to his neighbours; that root of bitterness bears gall and wormwood. Note, It is not strange if those that begin foolishly end madly; for an ungoverned tongue, the more liberty is allowed it, the more violent it grows.

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whence vain repetitions are called Battologies, *Matth. vi. 7.*

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selves to business, the land may do the better; but if they addict themselves to their pleasures, and prefer the gratifications of the flesh before the dispatch of the publick business, which they disfit themselves for, by eating and drinking in a morning; when judges are epicures, and do not eat to live, but live to eat, what good can a nation expect!

(2.) The people cannot but be happy, when their rulers are generous and active, sober and temperate, and men of business, *ver. 17. The land is then blessed*, 1. When the sovereign is governed by principles of honour, *when the king is the son of nobles*, i. e. acted and animated by a noble spirit, which scorns to do a base thing, and unbecoming so high a character; which is solicitous for the publick welfare, and prefers that before any private interests. Wisdom and virtue, and the fear of God, beneficence, and a readiness to do good to all mankind, these ennoble the royal blood. 2. When the subordinate magistrates are more in care to discharge their trusts, than to gratify their appetites; when they eat in due season, i. e. when they have dispatched their business, and got them a stomach: God gives the creatures *their meat in due season*, *Psal. cxlv. 15.* let not us take ours unseasonably, lest we lose the comfort of seeing God give it us. When they eat for strength, that their bodies may be fitted to serve their souls in the service of God and their country, and not for drunkenness, to make themselves unfit to do any thing either for God or man; and particularly to sit in judgment, for they will err through wine, *Isa. xxviii. 7.* will drink and forget the law, *Prov. xxxi. 5.* It is well with a people when their princes are examples of temperance; when those that have most to spend upon themselves, yet know how to deny themselves.

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3. How industrious generally all are, both princes and people, to get money, because that serves for all purposes, *ver. 19.* He seems to prefer money before mirth; *A feast is made for laughter*, not merely for eating, but chiefly for pleasant conversation, and the society of friends; not the laughter of the fool, which is madness, but that of wise men, by which they fit themselves for business, and severe studies: Spiritual feasts are made for spiritual laughter, holy joy in God. *Wine maketh merry, makes glad the life; but money* is the measure of all things, and answers all things. Pecuniae obediunt omnia. Though wine make merry, it will not be a house for us, nor a bed, nor clothing, nor provisions, and portions for children; but money, if men have enough of it, will be all these: The feast cannot be made without money, and though men have wine, they are not so much disposed to be merry, unless they have money for the necessary supports of life. Money, of it self, answers nothing, it will neither feed nor clothe, but, as it is the instrument of commerce, it answers all the occasions of this present life, what is to be had may be had for money, but it answers nothing to the soul; it will not procure the pardon of sin, the favour of God, the peace of conscience; the soul, as it is not redeemed, so it is not maintained with corruptible things, as silver and gold. Some refer this to rulers: It is ill with the people when they give up themselves to luxury and riot, feasting and making merry, not only because their business is neglected, but because money must be had to answer all these things, and, in order to that, the people squeezed by heavy taxes.

4. How cautious subjects have need to be, that they harbour not any disloyal purposes in their minds, nor keep up any factious cabals or consultations against the government, because it is ten to one they are discovered and brought to light, *ver. 20.* Though rulers should be guilty of some errors, yet be not upon all occasions arraigning their administration, and running them down, but make the best of them. Here, 1. The command teacheth us our duty: *Curse not the king, no not in thy thought*, do not wish ill to the government in thy mind; all sin begins there, and therefore the first risings of it must be curbed and suppressed, and particularly that of treason and sedition. *Curse not the rich*, the princes and governors, in thy bed-chamber, in a conclave, or club of persons disaffected to the government; associate not with such; come not into their secret; join not with them in speaking ill of the government, or plotting ill against it. 2. The reason consults our safety: Though the design be carried on never so closely, a bird

of the air shall carry the voice to the king, who has more spies about than thou art aware of, and that which has wings shall tell the matter, to thy confusion and ruin: God sees what men do, and hear what they say in secret, and, when he pleaseth, he can bring it to light by strange and unsuspected ways. Wouldst thou then not be hurt by the powers that be, nor be afraid of them? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; but if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, Rom. xiii. 3, 4.

C H A P. XI.

In this chapter we have, 1. A pressing exhortation to works of charity, and bounty to the poor, as the best cure of the vanity which our worldly riches are subject to, and the only way of making them turn to a substantial good account, ver. 1,—6. 2. A serious admonition to prepare for death, and judgment, and to begin betimes, even in the days of our youth to do so, ver. 7,—10.

i. **C**AST thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. 3. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or towards the north; in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. 4. He that observeth the wind, shall not sow: and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap. 5. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit; nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. 6. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Solomon had often in this book pressed it upon rich people to take the comfort of their riches themselves, here he presseth it upon them to do good to others with them, and to abound in liberality to the poor; which will another day abound to their account. Observe,

(1.) How the duty it self is recommended to us, ver. 1.

1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters; thy bread-corn upon the low places*, so some understand it, alluding to the husbandman, who goes forth bearing precious seed, sowing bread-corn from his family for his seedness, knowing that without that he can have no harvest another year; thus the charitable man takes from his bread-corn for seed-corn, abridgeth himself to supply the poor, that he may sow beside all waters, Isa. xxxii. 20. because as he sows he must reap, Gal. vi. 7. We read of the *harvest of the river*, Isa. xxxiii. 3. Waters in scripture are put for multitudes, Rev. xvi. 5. and there are multitudes of poor, we do not want objects of charity: And for mourners, the poor are men of sorrows. Thou must give bread, the necessary supports of life, not only give good words, but good things, Isa. lviii. 7. It must be *thy bread*, that which is honestly got; it is no charity, but injury, to give that which is none of our own to give; first *do justly*, and then *love mercy*. *Thy bread*, which thou didst design for thy self, let the poor have a share with thee, as they had with Job, chap. xxxi. 17. Give freely to the poor, though it may seem thrown away and lost, as that which is *cast upon the waters*. Send it a voyage, send it a venture, as merchants that trade by sea; trust it upon the waters, it shall not sink.

2. *Give a portion to seven, and also to eight*, i. e. be free and liberal in works of charity. (1.) Give much, if thou hast much to give, not a pittance, but a *portion*, not a bit or two, but a mess, a meal, give a large dole, not a sneaking one, give *good measure*, Luke vi. 38. be generous in giving, as they were, when on festival days they *sent portions to them for whom nothing was prepared*, Neh. viii. 10. worthy portions. (2.) Give to many, *to seven, and also to eight*: If thou meet with seven objects of charity, give to them all, and then if thou meet, not only with an eighth, give to that, but with eight more, give to them all too: Excuse not thy self with the good thou hast done, from the good thou hast further to do, but hold on and mend. In hard times, when the number of the poor increaseth, let thy charity be proportionably enlarged. God is rich in mercy to all; to us, though unworthy, he gives liberally, and upbraids not with former gifts, and we must be merciful as our heavenly Father is.

(2.) The reasons with which it is pressed upon us. Consider,

1. Our reward for well doing is very certain. Though thou *cast it upon the waters*, and it seem lost, thou thinkest thou hast given thy good word with it, and art never like to hear of it again, yet *thou shalt find it after many days*, as the husbandman finds his seed again in a plentiful harvest, and the merchant his venture in a rich return: It is not lost, but well-laid out, and well-laid up; it brings in full interest in the present gifts of God's providence, and graces and comforts of his Spirit; and the principal is sure, laid up

in heaven, for it is *lent to the Lord*. Seneca, a heathen, could say, *Nihil magis possidere me credam, quam bene donata.* — *Hoc habeo quodcumque dedi; hæc sunt divitiæ certæ in quacunque sortis humanæ levitate.* Thou shalt find it, perhaps, not quickly, but after many days; the return may be slow, but it is sure, and will be so much the more plentiful. Wheat, the most valuable grain, lies longest in the ground. Long voyages make best returns.

2. Our opportunity for well doing is very uncertain. *Thou knowest not what evil may be upon the earth*, which may deprive thee of thine estate, and put thee out of a capacity to do good; and therefore while thou hast wherewithal, be liberal with it; improve the present season, as the husbandman in sowing his ground, before the frost comes. We have reason to expect *evil upon the earth*, for we are born to trouble; what the evil may be we know not, but that we may be ready for it, whatever it is, it is our wisdom in the day of prosperity, to be in good, to be doing good. Many make use of this as an argument against giving to the poor; because they know not what hard times may come, when they may want themselves, whereas we should therefore the rather be charitable, that when *evil days come*, we may have the comfort of having done good while we were able; we would then hope to find mercy both with God and man, and therefore should now shew mercy. If by charity we trust God with what we have, we put it into good hands against bad times.

(3.) How he obviates the objections which might be made against this duty, and the excuses of the uncharitable.

1. Some will say, what they have is their own; and they have it for their own use, and why then should they *cast it thus upon the waters*? Why should I take my bread, and my flesh, and give it to I know not who? as Nabal pleaded, 1 Sam. xxv. 11. Look up, man, and consider how soon thou wouldst be starved in a barren ground, if the clouds over thy head should plead thus, that they have their waters for themselves; but thou seest when they are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth, to make it fruitful, till they are wearied, and spent with watering it, Job xxxvii. 11. Are the heavens thus bountiful to the poor earth, that is so far below them; and wilt thou grudge thy bounty to thy poor brother, that is *bone of thy bone*? — Or thus: Some will say, though they give but little to the poor, yet they thank God they have as charitable a heart as any; nay, saith Solomon, *If the clouds be full of rain, they will empty themselves*; if there be charity in the heart, it will shew it self, Jam. ii. 15; 16. He that *draws out his soul to the hungry*, will reach forth his hand to them as he has ability.

2. Some will say, their sphere of usefulness is low and narrow, they cannot do the good that they see others can, who are in more publick stations, and therefore they will sit still and do nothing; nay, saith he, *In the place where the tree falls*, or happens to be, *there it shall be*, for the benefit of those to whom it belongs, i. e. every man must labour to be a blessing to that place, whatever it is, where the providence of God casts him; wherever we are, we may find good work to do, if we have but hearts to do it. Or thus: Some will say, there are many that present themselves as objects of charity; who are unworthy, and I do not know whom it is fit to give it to: Trouble not thy self about that, saith Solomon, give as discreetly as thou canst, and then be satisfied, that, though the person should prove undeserving of thy charity, yet, if thou give it with an honest heart, thou shalt not lose thy reward; which way sever the charity is directed, north or south, thine shall be the benefit of it. This is commonly applied to death; therefore let us do good, and, as good trees, *bring forth the fruits of righteousness*, because death will shortly come, and cut us down, and we shall then be determined to an unchangeable state of happiness or misery, according to what was done in the body: As the tree falls at death, so it is like to lie to all eternity.

3. Some will object the many discouragements they have met with in their charity; they have been reproached for it as proud and pharisaical; they have but little to give, and they shall be despised if they do not give as others do; they know not but their children may come to want it; and they had better lay it up for them; they have taxes to pay; and purchases to make; they know not what use will be made of their charity, nor what construction will be put upon it; these, and a hundred such objections, he answers in one word, ver. 4. *He that observes the wind, shall not sow*, which signifies doing good, and *he that regards the clouds, shall not reap*, which signifies getting good; if we stand thus magnifying every little difficulty, and making the worst of it, starting objections, and fancying hardship and danger where there is none, we shall never go on, much less go through with our work, nor make any thing of it: If the husbandmen should decline or leave off sowing for the sake of every flying cloud, and reaping for the sake of every blast of wind, he would make but an ill account of his husbandry at the year's end: The duties of religion are as necessary as sowing and reaping, and will turn as much to our own advantage; the discouragements we meet with in these duties are but as *winds and clouds*, which will do us no harm; and which, those that put on a little courage and resolution will despise, and easily break through. Note, Those that will be deterred and driven off, by small and seeming difficulties, from great and real duties, will never bring any thing to pass in religion, for there will always arise some

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4. How cautious subjects have need to be, that they harbour not any disloyal purposes in their minds, nor keep up any factious cabals or consultations against the government, because it is ten to one they are discovered and brought to light, *ver. 20. Though rulers should be guilty of some errors, yet be not upon all occasions arraigning their administration, and running them down, but make the best of them. Here, 1. The command teacheth us our duty: Curse not the king, no not in thy thought*, do not wish ill to the government in thy mind; all sin begins there, and therefore the first risings of it must be curbed and suppressed, and particularly that of treason and sedition. *Curse not the rich*, the princes and governors, *in thy bed-chamber*, in a conclave, or club of persons disaffected to the government; associate not with such; *come not into their secret*; join not with them in speaking ill of the government, or plotting ill against it. 2. The reason consults our safety: Though the design be carried on never so closely, *a bird*

of

of the air shall carry the voice to the king, who has more spies about than thou art aware of, and that which has wings shall tell the matter, to thy confusion and ruin: God sees what men do, and hear what they say in secret, and, when he pleaseth, he can bring it to light by strange and unsuspected ways. Wouldst thou then not be hurt by the powers that be, nor be afraid of them? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same; but if thou do that which is evil, be afraid, Rom. xiii. 3, 4.

C H A P. XI.

In this chapter we have, 1. A pressing exhortation to works of charity, and bounty to the poor, as the best cure of the vanity which our worldly riches are subject to, and the only way of making them turn to a substantial good account, ver. 1,—6. 2. A serious admonition to prepare for death, and judgment, and to begin betimes, even in the days of our youth to do so, ver. 7,—10.

1. **C**AST thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. 2. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. 3. If the clouds be full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or towards the north; in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. 4. He that observeth the wind, shall not sow: and he that regardeth the clouds, shall not reap. 5. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit; nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. 6. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

Solomon had often in this book pressed it upon rich people to take the comfort of their riches themselves, here he presseth it upon them to do good to others with them, and to abound in liberality to the poor; which will another day abound to their account. Observe,

(1.) How the duty it self is recommended to us, ver. 1.

1. *Cast thy bread upon the waters; thy bread-corn upon the low places*, so some understand it, alluding to the husbandman, who goes forth bearing precious seed, sparing bread-corn from his family for his seedness, knowing that without that he can have no harvest another year; thus the charitable man takes from his bread-corn for seed-corn, abridgeth himself to supply the poor, that he may sow beside all waters, Isa. xxxii. 20. because as he sows he must reap, Gal. vi. 7. We read of the *harvest of the river*, Isa. xxiii. 3. Waters in scripture are put for multitudes, Rev. xvi. 5. and there are multitudes of poor, we do not want objects of charity: And for mourners, the poor are men of sorrows. Thou must give bread, the necessary supports of life, not only give good words, but good things, Isa. lviii. 7. It must be *thy bread*, that which is honestly got; it is no charity, but injury, to give that which is none of our own to give; first *do justly*, and then *love mercy*. *Thy bread*, which thou didst design for thy self, let the poor have a share with thee, as they had with Job, chap. xxxi. 17. Give freely to the poor, though it may seem thrown away and lost, as that which is *cast upon the waters*. Send it a voyage, send it a venture, as merchants that trade by sea; trust it upon the waters, it shall not sink.

2. *Give a portion to seven, and also to eight*, i. e. be free and liberal in works of charity. (1.) Give much, if thou hast much to give, not a pittance, but a *portion*, not a bit or two, but a mess, a meal, give a large dole, not a sneaking one, give *good measure*, Luke vi. 38. be generous in giving, as they were, when on festival days they sent portions to them for whom nothing was prepared, Neh. viii. 10. worthy portions. (2.) Give to many; *to seven, and also to eight*: If thou meet with seven objects of charity, give to them all, and then if thou meet, not only with an eighth, give to that, but with eight more, give to them all too: Excuse not thy self with the good thou hast done, from the good thou hast further to do, but hold on and mend. In hard times, when the number of the poor increaseth, let thy charity be proportionably enlarged. God is rich in mercy to all; to us, though unworthy, he gives liberally, and upbraids not with former gifts, and we must be merciful as our heavenly Father is.

(2.) The reasons with which it is pressed upon us. Consider,

1. Our reward for well doing is very certain. Though thou *cast it upon the waters*, and it seem lost, thou thinkest thou hast given thy good word with it, and art never like to hear of it again, yet thou shalt find it after many days, as the husbandman finds his seed again in a plentiful harvest, and the merchant his venture in a rich return: It is not lost, but well-laid out, and well laid up; it brings in full interest in the present gifts of God's providence, and graces and comforts of his Spirit; and the principal is sure, laid up

in heaven, for it is lent to the Lord. Seneca, a heathen, could say, *Nihil magis possidere me credam, quam bene donata*. — *Hoc habeo quodcumque dedi; hæc sunt divitiæ certæ in quacunque fortis humanæ levitate. Thou shalt find it*, perhaps, not quickly, but after many days; the return may be slow; but it is sure, and will be so much the more plentiful. Wheat, the most valuable grain, lies longest in the ground. Long voyages make best returns.

2. Our opportunity for well doing is very uncertain. Thou knowest not what evil may be upon the earth, which may deprive thee of thine estate, and put thee out of a capacity to do good; and therefore while thou hast wherewithal, be liberal with it; improve the present season, as the husbandman in sowing his ground, before the frost comes. We have reason to expect evil upon the earth, for we are born to trouble; what the evil may be we know not, but that we may be ready for it, whatever it is, it is our wisdom in the day of prosperity, to be in good, to be doing good. Many make use of this as an argument against giving to the poor; because they know not what hard times may come, when they may want themselves, whereas we should therefore the rather be charitable, that when evil days come, we may have the comfort of having done good while we were able; we would then hope to find mercy both with God and man, and therefore should now shew mercy. If by charity we trust God with what we have, we put it into good hands against bad times.

(3.) How he obviates the objections which might be made against this duty, and the excuses of the uncharitable.

1. Some will say, what they have is their own; and they have it for their own use, and why then should they cast it thus upon the waters? Why should I take my bread, and my flesh, and give it to I know not who? as Nabal pleaded, 1 Sam. xxv. 11. Look up, man, and consider how soon thou wouldst be starved in a barren ground, if the clouds over thy head should plead thus, that they have their waters for themselves; but thou seest when they are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth, to make it fruitful, till they are wearied, and spent with watering it, Job xxxvii. 11. Are the heavens thus bountiful to the poor earth, that is so far below them; and wilt thou grudge thy bounty to thy poor brother, that is *bene of thy bene*? — Or thus: Some will say, though they give but little to the poor, yet they thank God they have as charitable a heart as any; nay, saith Solomon, *If the clouds be full of rain, they will empty themselves*; if there be charity in the heart, it will shew it self, Jam. ii. 15; 16. He that draws out his soul to the hungry, will reach forth his hand to them as he has ability.

2. Some will say; their sphere of usefulness is low and narrow, they cannot do the good that they see others can, who are in more publick stations, and therefore they will sit still and do nothing; nay, saith he, *In the place where the tree falls*, or happens to be; *there it shall be*, for the benefit of those to whom it belongs, i. e. every man must labour to be a blessing to that place, whatever it is, where the providence of God casts him; wherever we are, we may find good work to do, if we have but hearts to do it. Or thus: Some will say, there are many that present themselves as objects of charity; who are unworthy, and I do not know whom it is fit to give it to: Trouble not thy self about that, saith Solomon, give as discreetly as thou canst, and then be satisfied, that; though the person should prove undeserving of thy charity, yet, if thou give it with an honest heart, thou shalt not lose thy reward; which way soever the charity is directed, north or south, thine shall be the benefit of it. This is commonly applied to death; therefore let us do good, and, as good trees, bring forth the fruits of righteousness, because death will shortly come, and cut us down, and we shall then be determined to an unchangeable state of happiness or misery, according to what was done in the body: As the tree falls at death, so it is like to lie to all eternity.

3. Some will object the many discouragements they have met with in their charity; they have been reproached for it as proud and pharisaical; they have but little to give, and they shall be despised if they do not give as others do; they know not but their children may come to want it, and they had better lay it up for them; they have taxes to pay; and purchases to make; they know not what use will be made of their charity, nor what construction will be put upon it; these, and a hundred such objections, he answers in one word, ver. 4. *He that observeth the wind, shall not sow*, which signifies doing good, and *he that regards the clouds, shall not reap*, which signifies getting good; if we stand thus magnifying every little difficulty, and making the worst of it, starting objections, and fancying hardship and danger where there is none, we shall never go on, much less go through with our work, nor make any thing of it: If the husbandmen should decline or leave off sowing for the sake of every flying cloud, and reaping for the sake of every blast of wind, he would make but an ill account of his husbandry at the year's end: The duties of religion are as necessary as sowing and reaping, and will turn as much to our own advantage; the discouragements we meet with in these duties are but as winds and clouds, which will do us no harm; and which, those that put on a little courage and resolution will despise, and easily break through. Note, Those that will be deterred and driven off, by small and seeming difficulties, from great and real duties, will never bring any thing to pass in religion, for there will always arise some

some *wind*, some *cloud* or other, at least, in our own imagination, to discourage us. *Winds* and *clouds* are in God's hand, are designed to try us, and our christianity obligeth us to endure hardships.

4. Some will say, they do not see in which way what they expend in charity should ever be made up to them, they do not find themselves ever the richer, why should they depend upon the general promise of a blessing on the charitable, unless they saw which way to expect the operation of it? To this he answers, *Thou knowest not the work of God*, nor is it fit thou shouldst; thou mayest be sure he will make good his word of promise, though he doth not tell thee how or which way, and though he work in a way by himself, according to the counsels of his unsearchable wisdom; he will work, and none shall hinder; but then, he will work, and none shall direct, or prescribe to him; the blessing shall work insensibly, but irresistibly; God's work shall certainly agree with his word, whether we see it or no. Our ignorance of the work of God, he shews in two instances. 1. *We know not what is the way of the Spirit*; of the *wind*, so some; we *know not whence it comes*, or *whither it goes*, nor when it will turn; yet the seamen lie ready waiting for it, till it doth chop about in favour of them; so we must do our duty in expectation of the time appointed for the blessing. Or, of the human soul; we know that God made us, and gave us these souls, but how they entered into these bodies, are united to them, animate them, and operate upon them, we know not; the soul is a mystery to itself, no marvel then that the *work of God* is so to us. 2. *We know not how the bones are fashioned in the womb of her that is with child*; we cannot describe the manner either of the formation of the body, or its information with a soul; both we know are the *work of God*, and we acquiesce in his work, but cannot in either trace the process of the operation; we doubt not of the birth of the child that is conceived, though we know not how it is formed, nor need we doubt of the performance of the promise, though we perceive not how things work towards it: And we may well trust God to provide for us that which is convenient, without our anxious disquieting cares, and therein to recompense us for our charity, since it was without any knowledge or forecast of ours that our bodies were curiously wrought in secret, and our souls found the way into them; and so the argument is the same, and urged to the same intent, with that of our Saviour, *Matt. vi. 25. The life, the living soul that God has given us, is more than meat; the body, that God has made us, is more than raiment*; let him therefore that has done the greater for us, be cheerfully depended upon to do the lesser.

5. Some may say, they have been charitable, have given a great deal to the poor, and never yet saw any return for it, many days are past, and they have not found it again: To which he answers, *ver. 6. yet go on, proceed and persevere in well doing, let slip no opportunity: In the morning sow thy seed*, upon the objects of charity that offer themselves early, *and in the evening do not withhold thy hand*, under pretence that thou art weary; as thou hast opportunity be doing good some way or other all the day long, as the husbandman follows his seedness from morning till night. *In the morning of youth*, lay out thy self to do good; give out of the little thou hast to begin the world with; *and in the evening of old age*, yield not to the common temptation old people are in to be penurious; even then *withhold not thy hand*, and think not to excuse thy self from charitable works, by purposing to make a charitable will, but do good to the last, *for thou knowest not which work of charity and piety shall prosper*, both as to others, and as to thy self, *this or that*, but hast reason to hope, that *both shall be alike good. Gal. vi. 9. Be not weary of well doing, for in due season, in God's time, and that is the best time, you shall reap.* This is applicable to spiritual charity, our pious endeavours for the good of the souls of others, let us continue them, for though we have long laboured in vain, we may at length see the success of them. Let ministers on the days of their seedness sow both morning and evening, *for who can tell which shall prosper?*

7. ¶ Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. 8. But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity. 9. ¶ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment. 10. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for childhood and youth are vanity.

Here is an admonition both to old people, and to young people, to think of dying, and get ready for it. Having by many excellent precepts taught us how to live well, the preacher comes now, towards the close of his discourse, to teach us how to die well, and to put us in mind of our latter end.

(1.) He applies himself to the aged, writes to them as fathers, to awaken them to think of death, *ver. 7, 8.* Here is,

1. A rational concession of the sweetness of life, which old people find by experience. *Truly the light is sweet*; the light of the sun is so; it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold it; light was the first thing made in the formation of the great world, as the eye is one of the first in the formation of the body, the little world; it is pleasant to see the light, the heathens were so charmed with the pleasure of it, that they worshipped the sun; it is pleasant by it to see other things, the many agreeable prospects this world gives us; the light of life is so: Light is put for life, *Job iii. 20, 23.* It cannot be denied but that life is sweet: It is sweet to bad men, because they have *their portion in this life*; it is sweet to good men, because they have this life as the time of their preparation for a better life: It is sweet to all men; nature saith it is so, and there is no disputing against it; nor can death be desired for its own sake, but dreaded, unless as a period to present evils, or a passage to future good: Life is sweet, and therefore we have need to double a guard upon our selves, lest we love it too well.

2. A caution to think of death, even in the midst of life, and of life when it is most sweet, and we are most apt to forget death: *If a man live many years, yet let him remember the days of darkness are coming.* Here is, (1.) A summer's day supposed to be enjoyed, that life may continue long, even many years, and that, by the goodness of God, it may be made comfortable, and a man may rejoice in them all: There are those that *live many years* in this world, escape many dangers, receive many mercies, and therefore are secure that they shall want no good, and that no evil shall befall them, that the pitcher which has come so oft from the well safe and sound, shall never come home broken: But who are they that *live many years, and rejoice in them all?* alas! none; we have but hours of joy for months of sorrow. However, some rejoice in their years, their many years, more than others, if these two things meet, a prosperous state, and a cheerful spirit, these two indeed may do much towards enabling a man to *rejoice in them all*, and yet the most prosperous state has its allays, and the most cheerful spirit has its damps; jovial sinners have their melancholy qualms, and cheerful saints have their gracious sorrows; so that it is but a supposition, not a case in fact, that a man should *live many years, and rejoice in them all.* But, (2.) Here is a winter's night proposed to be expected after this summer's day, *yet let this hearty old man remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.* Note, 1. There are *days of darkness* coming, the days of our lying in the grave, there the body will lie in the dark, there the eye sees not, the sun shines not: The darkness of death is opposed to the light of life, the grave is a *land of darkness*, *Job x. 21.* 2. Those *days of darkness* will be many, the days of our lying under ground will be more than the days of our living above ground: They are many, but they are not infinite; as many as they are they will be numbered and finished when *the heavens be no more*, *Job xiv. 12.* As the longest day will have its night, so the longest night will have its morning. 3. It is good for us often to remember those *days of darkness*, that we may not be lifted up with pride, nor lulled asleep in carnal security, nor ever transported into indecencies by vain mirth. 4. Notwithstanding the long continuance of life, and the many comforts of it, yet we must remember the *days of darkness*, because those will certainly come however, and they will come with much the less terror if we have thought of them before.

(2.) He applies himself to the young, and writes to them as children, to awaken them to think of death, *ver. 9, 10.* where we have,

1. An ironical concession to the vanities and pleasures of youth: *Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth.* Some make this to be the counsel which the atheist and the epicure give to the young man, the poisonous suggestions against which, Solomon, in the close of the verse, prescribes a powerful antidote. But it is more emphatical, if we take it, as it is commonly understood, by way of irony, like that of Elijah to the priests of Baal, *Cry aloud, for he is a god*; or of Micajah to Ahab, *Go to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper*; or of Christ to his disciples, *Sleep on now. Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth*, live a merry life, follow thy sports, and take thy pleasures, *let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth*, cheer thee with its fancies, and foolish hopes, entertain thy self with thy pleasing dreams, ay, do, *walk in the ways of thy heart*, do whatever thou hast a mind to do, and stick at nothing that may gratify the sensual appetite; *quicquid libet licet*; do thou *walk in the ways of thy heart*, and let thine heart walk after thine eyes, a rambling heart after a roving eye; what is pleasing in thine own eyes do it, whether it be pleasing in the eyes of God or no: Solomon speaks thus ironically to the young man, 1. To intimate, that this is that which he would do, and which he would fain have leave to do, in which he placeth his happiness, and on which he sets his heart. 2. That he wisheth all about him would give him this counsel, would prophesy to him such smooth things as these, and cannot brook any advice to the contrary, but reckons those his enemies that bid him be sober and serious. 3. To expose his folly, and the great absurdity of a voluptuous, vicious course of life; the very description of it, if men would see things entirely, and judge of them impartially, is enough to shew how contrary to reason those

act

act that live such a life : The very opening of the cause is enough to determine it without any argument. 4. To shew, that if men give themselves to such a course of life as this, it is just with God to give them up to it, to abandon them to their own heart's lusts, that they may *walk in their own counsels*, *Ecc. iv. 17.*

2. A powerful check given to these vanities and pleasures ; *but know thou, that for all these things, God shall bring thee into judgment*, and duly consider that, and then live such a luxurious life if thou canst, if thou darest : This is a colasterion, or corrective to the foregoing concession, and plucks in the reins he had laid in the neck of the young man's lusts : *Know then*, for a certainty, that if thou dost take such a liberty as this, it will be thy everlasting ruin, thou hast to do with a God who will not let it go unpunished. Note, 1. There is a judgment to come. 2. We must every one of us be brought into judgment, however we may now put far from us that evil day. 3. We shall be reckoned with for all our carnal mirth, and sensual pleasures in that day. 4. It is good for all, but especially for young people, to know and consider this, that they may not, by the indulgence of their youthful lusts, *treasure up unto themselves wrath against that day of wrath*, the wrath of the Lamb.

3. A word of caution and exhortation inferred from all this, *ver. 10.* Let young people look to themselves, and manage well both their souls and their bodies, their heart and their flesh. 1. Let them take care that their minds be not lifted up with pride, or disturbed with anger, or any sinful passion. *Remove sorrow*, or anger, *from thy heart* ; the word signifies, any disorder, or perturbation of the mind. Young people are apt to be impatient of check and controul, to vex and fret at any thing that is humbling and mortifying to them, and their proud hearts rise against every thing that crosseth and contradiceth them ; they are so set upon that which is pleasing to sense, that they cannot bear any thing that is displeasing, but it goes with sorrow to their heart ; their pride often disquiets them, and makes them uneasy ; put that away, and the love of the world, and lay thine expectations low from the creature, and then disappointments will not be occasions of sorrow and anger to thee. Some by sorrow, here understand that carnal mirth described, *ver. 9.* the end of which will be bitterness and sorrow. Let them keep at a distance from every thing which will be sorrow to reflection. 2. Let them take care that their bodies be not infected by intemperance, uncleanness, or any fleshly lusts. *Put away evil from the flesh*, and let not the members of thy body be instruments of unrighteousness. The evil of sin will be the evil of punishment, and that which thou art fond of as good for the flesh, because it gratifies the appetites of it, will prove evil, and hurtful to it, and therefore put it far from thee, the further the better.

The preacher, to enforce his admonition, both to old and young, urgeth, as an effectual argument, that which is the great argument of his discourse, the vanity of all present things, their uncertainty and insufficiency.

1. He minds old people of this, *ver. 8.* *All that cometh is vanity* ; yea, though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all. All that is come already, and all that is yet to come, how much soever men promise themselves from the concluding scenes, it is all *vanity*. What will be, will do no more to make men happy, than what has been. *All that come into the world are vanity*, they are altogether so at their best estate.

2. He minds young people of this, childhood and youth are *vanity* : The dispositions and actions of childhood and youth, have in them a great deal of impertinence and iniquity, sinful vanity, which young people have need to watch against, and get cured : The pleasures and advantages of childhood and youth, have in them no certainty, satisfaction, or continuance ; they are passing away ; these flowers will soon wither, and these blossoms fall ; let them therefore knit then into good fruit, which will continue, and abound to a good account.

CHAP. XII.

The wise and penitent preacher is here closing his sermon, and he closes it, not only like a good orator, but like a good preacher, with that which was likely to make the best impressions, and which he wished might be powerful and lasting upon his hearers. Here is,

1. *An exhortation to young people to begin betimes to be religious, and not to put it off to old age*, *ver. 1.* enforced with arguments taken from the calamities of old age, *ver. 1.—5.* and the great change that death will make upon us, *ver. 6, 7.* 2. *A repetition of the great truth he had undertaken to prove in this discourse, the vanity of the world*, *ver. 8.* 3. *A confirmation and recommendation of what he had written in this and his other books, as worthy to be duly weighed and considered*, *ver. 9.—12.* 4. *The whole matter summed up, and concluded, with a charge to all to be truly religious, in consideration of the judgment to come*, *ver. 13, 14.*

1. **R**emember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them ; 2. While the sun, or the light, or the

moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain : 3. In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease, because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, 4. And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low ; 5. Also when they shall be afraid of *that which is high*, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets : 6. Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. 7. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was : and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

Here is, 1. A call to young people to think of God, and mind their duty to him when they are young. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* This is, (1.) The royal preacher's application of his sermon concerning the vanity of the world, and every thing in it. You that are young flatter your selves with expectations of great things from it, but, believe those that have tried, it yields no solid satisfaction to a soul ; therefore, that you may not be deceived by this vanity, nor too much disturbed by it, *remember your Creator*, and so guard your selves against the mischiefs that arise from the vanity of the creature. (2.) It is the royal physician's antidote against the particular diseases of youth, the love of mirth, and the indulgence of sensual pleasures, the vanity which childhood and youth is subject to ; to prevent and cure this, *remember thy Creator.* Here is, 1. A great duty pressed upon us, to *remember God as our Creator* ; not only remember that God is our Creator, that he *made us*, and *not we our selves*, and is therefore our rightful Lord and Owner, but we must engage our selves to him with these considerations which his being our Creator lays us under, and pay him the honour and duty which we owe him as our Creator. *Remember thy Creators*, the word is plural, as it is, *Job xxxv. 8.* *Where is God my Makers ?* For God said, *Let us make man*, us, Father, Son, and holy Ghost. 2. The proper season for this duty ; *in the days of thy youth* ; the *days of thy choice*, so some ; thy choice days, thy choosing days : Begin in the beginning of thy days to remember him from whom thou hadst thy being, and go on according to that good beginning : Call him to mind when thou art young, and keep him in mind throughout all the days of thy youth, and never forget him. Guard thus against the temptations of youth, and thus improve the advantages of it.

2. A reason to enforce this command : *While the evil days come not, and the years, of which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* Do it quickly,

(1.) Before sickness and death comes ; do it while thou livest, for it will be too late to do it when death has removed thee from this state of trial and probation, to that of recompence and retribution. The days of sickness and death are *the days of evil*, terrible to nature, *evil days* indeed to those that have forgotten their Creator ; these *evil days* will come, sooner or later, as yet they come not ; for God is *long suffering to us-ward*, and gives us *space to repent* ; the continuing of life is but the deferring of death, and while life is continued, and death deferred, it concerns us to prepare, and get the property of death altered, that we may die comfortably.

(2.) Before old age comes, which, if death prevent not, will come, and they will be *years, of which we shall say, we have no pleasure in them* ; when we shall not relish the delights of sense, as Barzillai, 2 Sam. xix. 35. when we shall be loaded with bodily infirmities, old and blind, or old and lame ; when we shall be taken off from our usefulness, and our *strength shall be labour and sorrow* ; when we shall either have parted with our relations, and all our old friends, or be afflicted in them, and see them weary of us ; when we shall feel our selves die by inches ; these *years draw nigh*, when *all that comes will be vanity*, the remaining months all months of vanity, and there will be *no pleasure*, but in the reflection of a good life on earth, and the expectation of a better life in heaven.

These two arguments he enlargeth upon in the following verses, only inverting the order, and shews,

(1.) How many are the calamities of old age, and that, if we should live to be old, our days would be such as we shall *have no pleasure in* ; which is a good reason why we should return to God, and make our peace with him, *in the days of our youth*, and not put it off till we come to be old ; for it will be no thanks to us to leave the pleasures of sin when they have left us, nor to return to God when need forceth us ; but the greatest absurdity and ingratitude imaginable, is to give the cream and flower of our days to the devil, and reserve the bran, and refuse, and dregs of them for

God; this is offering *the torn, and the lame, and the sick for sacrifice*; and besides, old age being thus clogged with infirmities, it is the greatest folly imaginable to put off that needful work till then, which requires the best of our strength, when our faculties are in their prime, and especially to make the work more difficult by a longer continuance in sin, and, by laying up treasures of guilt in the conscience, to add to the burthens of age, and make them much heavier. If the calamities of age will be such as is here represented, we shall have need of something to support and comfort us then, and nothing will be more effectual to do that than the testimony of our consciences for us, that we began betimes to remember our Creator, and have not since laid aside the remembrance of him. How can we expect God should help us when we are old, if we will not serve him when we are young? See *Psalm lxxi. 17, 18.*

The decays and infirmities of old age are here elegantly described in figurative expressions, which have some difficulty in them to us now, who are not acquainted with the common phrases and metaphors used in Solomon's age and language; but the general scope is plain, to shew how uncomfortable generally the days of old age are.

1. Then *the sun, and the light of it, the moon, and the stars,* and the light which they borrow from it, will be darkened, i. e. they look dim to old people through the decay of their sight; their countenance is clouded, and the beauty and lustre of it is eclipsed; their intellectual powers and faculties, which are as lights in the soul, are weakened; their understanding and memory fails them, and their apprehension is not so quick, nor their fancy so lively, as it has been; light is often put for joy and prosperity; the days of their mirth are over, and they have not the pleasure, either of the converse of the day, or the repose of the night, for both *the sun and the moon* are darkened to them.

2. Then *the clouds return after the rain*; as when the weather is disposed to wet, no sooner is one cloud blown over, but another succeeds it, so it is with old people, when they are got pretty well of one pain or ailment, they are seized with another, so that their distempers are *like a continual dropping in a very rainy day*: The end of one trouble is in this world but the beginning of another, and deep calls unto deep: Old people are often afflicted with defluxions of rheum, like soaking rain, after which still more clouds return, feeding the humour, so that it is continually grievous, and therein the body doth as it were melt away.

3. Then *the keepers of the house tremble*; the head, which is as the watch-tower shakes, and the arms and hands, which are ready for the preservation of the body, shake too, and grow feeble, upon every sudden approach and attack of danger; that vigour of the animal spirits, which used to be exerted for self-defence, fails, and cannot do its office; old people are easily dispirited and discouraged.

4. Then *the strong men shall bow themselves*, the legs and thighs that used to support the body, and bear its weight, bend and buckle, and cannot serve for travel as they have done, but are soon tired. Old men that have been in their time *strong men*, are become weak, and stoop for age, *Zech. viii. 4. God taketh no pleasure in the legs of a man*, *Psal. cxlvii. 10.* for their strength will soon fade, but *in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength*, he has everlasting arms.

5. Then *the grinders cease, because they are few*; the teeth, with which we grind our meat, and prepare it for concoction, cease to do their part, *because they are few*; they are rotted and broken, and, perhaps, have been drawn because they ached; some old people have lost all their teeth, and others have but few left; and this infirmity is the more considerable, because the meat not being well chewed, for want of teeth, is one great reason why it is not well digested, which has as much an influence as any thing upon the other decays of age.

6. *Those that look out of the windows are darkened*, i. e. the eyes wax dim, as Isaac's, *Gen. xxvii. 1.* and Ahijah's, *1 Kings xiv. 4.* Moses was a rare instance of one, who, at one hundred and twenty years old, had good eye-sight, but ordinarily, the sight decays in old people as soon as any thing, and it is a mercy to them that art helps nature with spectacles. We have need to improve our sight well while we have it, because the light of the eyes may be gone before the light of life.

7. *The doors are shut in the streets*; old people keep within doors, and care not for going abroad to entertainments; the lips, the doors of the mouth, are shut in eating, because the teeth are gone, and *the sound of the grinding with them is low*, so that they have not that command of their meat in their mouths which they used to have; they cannot digest their meat, and therefore little grist is brought to the mill.

8. Old people *rise up at the voice of the bird*, they have no sound sleep, as young people have, but a little thing disturbs them, even the chirping of a bird; they cannot rest for coughing, and therefore rise up at cock-crowing, as soon as any body is stirring; or, they are apt to be jealous, and timorous, and full of care, which breaks their sleep, and makes them rise early; or, they are apt to be superstitious, and *rise up*, as in a fright, *at those voices of birds*, as of ravens, or screech-owls, which soothsayers call ominous.

9. With them *all the daughters of musick are brought low*, they

have neither voice nor ear, can neither sing themselves, nor take any pleasure, as Solomon had done, in the days of his youth, in *singing men, and singing women, and musical instruments*, chap. ii. 8. Old people grow thick of hearing, and unapt to distinguish sounds and voices.

10. They are *afraid of that which is high*, afraid to go to the top of any high place, either because for want of breath they cannot reach it, or their heads being giddy, or their legs failing them, they dare not venture to it; or they frighten themselves with fancies, that *that which is high* will fall upon them: Fear is in the way, they can neither ride nor walk with their usual boldness, but are afraid of every thing that lies in their way, lest it throw them down.

11. *The almond-tree flourisheth*, i. e. the old man's hair is gone white, so that his head looks like an almond-tree in the blossom. The almond-tree blossoms before any other tree, and therefore fitly shews what haste old age makes in seizing upon men; it prevents their expectations, and comes faster upon them than they thought of: Gray hairs are here and there upon them, and they perceive it not.

12. *The grasshopper is a burthen, and desire fails*: Old men can bear nothing, the lightest thing sits heavy upon them, both on their bodies, and on their minds, a little thing sinks and breaks them; perhaps, *the grasshopper* was some food that was looked upon to be very light of digestion; John Baptist's meat *was locusts*; but even that lies heavy upon an old man's stomach, and therefore *desire fails*, i. e. he has no appetite to his meat, neither shall he *regard the desire of woman*, as that king, *Dan. xi. 37.* Old men become mindless and listless, and the pleasures of sense are to them tasteless and sapless.

It is probable, Solomon wrote this when he was himself old, and could speak feelingly of the infirmities of age, which, perhaps, grew the faster upon him, for the indulgence he had given himself in sensual pleasures. Some old people bear up better than others under the decays of age, but more or less, the days of old age are, and will be, *evil days*, and of little pleasure. Great care therefore should be taken to pay respect and honour to old people, that they may have something to balance these grievances, and nothing may be done to add to them. And all this put together, makes up a good reason why we should *remember our Creator in the days of our youth*, that he may remember us with favour when these *evil days* come, and his comforts may delight our souls, when the delights of sense are in a manner worn off.

(2.) He shews how great a change death will make with us; which will be either the prevention, or the period of the miseries of old age: Nothing else will keep them off, nor any thing else cure them: Therefore, *remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth*, because death is certainly before thee, perhaps, it is very near thee, and it is a serious thing to die, and we are concerned with the utmost care and diligence to prepare for it.

1. Death will fix us in an unchangeable state: *Man shall then go to his long home*, and all these infirmities and decays of age, are harbingers of, and advances towards that awful remove. At death *man goes* from this world, and all the employments and enjoyments of it; he is gone for good and all, as to his present state; he is gone *home*; for here he was a stranger and pilgrim; both soul and body go to the place whence they came, *ver. 7.* He is gone to his rest, to the place where he is to fix: He is gone *to his home*; *to the house of his world*, so some; for this world is not his: He is gone *to his long home*; for the days of his lying in the grave will be many: He is gone to his house of eternity; not only to his house whence he shall never return to this world, but to the house where he must be for ever. This should make us willing to die, that at death we must *go home*; and why should we not long to go to our Father's house? And this should quicken us to get ready to die, that we must then go to our *long home*, to an *everlasting habitation*.

2. Death will be an occasion of sorrow to our friends that love us. When *man goes to his long home*, the mourners go about the streets, the real mourners, and those, as now with us, distinguished by their habits as they go along the streets; the mourners for ceremony, that were hired to weep for the dead, both to express, and to excite the real mourning. When we die, we not only remove to a melancholy house before us, but we leave a melancholy house behind us: Tears are a tribute due to the dead, and this, among other circumstances, makes it a serious thing to die: But in vain do we *go to the house of mourning*, and see the mourners go about the streets, if it do not help to make us serious and pious mourners in the closet.

3. Death will dissolve the frame of nature, and take down the earthly house of this tabernacle, which is elegantly described, *ver. 6.* Then shall *the silver cord*, by which soul and body were wonderfully fastened together, *be loosed*, that sacred knot untied, and those old friends be forced to part; then shall *the golden bowl*, that held the waters of life for us, *be broken*; then shall *the pitcher*, with which we used to fetch up water, for the constant support of life, and the repair of its decays, *be broken*, even *at the fountain*, so that it can fetch up no more, and *the wheel*, all those organs that serve for the collecting and distributing of nourishment, shall be broken,

broken, and disabled to do their office any more; the body shall become like a watch when the spring is broke, the motion of all the wheels is stopped, and they all stand still; the machine is taken to pieces; the heart beats no more, nor doth the blood circulate. Some apply this to the ornaments and utensils of life; rich people must at death leave behind them their clothing, and furniture of silver and gold, and poor people their earthen pitchers, and the drawers of water will have their wheel broken.

4. Death will resolve us into our first principles; *ver. 7.* Man is a strange sort of creature, a ray of heaven united to a clod of earth; at death these are separated, and each goes to the place whence it came.

(1.) The body, that clod of clay, returns to its own earth, it is made of the earth; Adam's body was so, and we are of the same mould; it is a house of clay, at death it is laid in the earth, and, in a little time, will be resolved into earth, not to be distinguished from common earth, according to the sentence, *Gen. iii. 19. Dust thou art; and therefore to dust thou shalt return.* Let us not therefore indulge the appetites of the body, nor pamper it, it will be worms meat shortly, nor let sin reign in our mortal bodies, because they are mortal, *Rom. vi. 12.*

(2.) The soul, that beam of light, returns to that God, who, when he made man of the dust of the ground, breathed into him the breath of life, to make him a living soul, *Gen. ii. 7.* and formeth the spirit of every man within him. When the fire consumes the wood, the flame ascends; when the ashes return to the earth, out of which the wood grew: The soul doth not die with the body; it is redeemed from the power of the grave, *Psal. xlix. 15.* it can subsist without it, and will, in a state of separation from it, as the candle burns, and burns brighter, when it is taken out of the dark lantern: It removes to the world of spirits, to which it is allied: It goes to God, as a Judge, to give account of it self, and to be lodged either with the spirits in prison, *1 Pet. iii. 19.* or with the spirits in paradise, *Luke xxiii. 43.* according to what was done in the body. This makes death terrible to the wicked, whose souls go to God as an Avenger, and comfortable to the godly, whose souls go to God as a Father, into whose hands they cheerfully commit them, through a Mediator, out of whom sinners may justly dread to think of going to God.

8. ¶ Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. 9. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. 10. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. 11. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastned by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. 12. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Solomon is here drawing towards a close, and is loth to part, till he has gained his point, and prevailed with his hearers, with his readers, to seek for that satisfaction in God only, and in their duty to him, which they can never find in the creature.

(1.) He repeats his text, *ver. 8.* 1. As that which he had fully demonstrated the truth of, and so made good his undertaking in this sermon, wherein he had kept close to his text, and both his reasons and his application were to the purpose. 2. As that which he desired to inculcate, both upon others, and upon himself; to have it ready, and to make use of it upon all occasions; we see it daily proved, let it therefore be daily improved; *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*

(2.) He recommends what he had written upon this subject, by divine direction and inspiration, to our serious consideration. The words of this book are faithful, and well worthy our acceptance, for,

1. They are the words of one that was a convert, a penitent, that could speak by dear bought experience of the vanity of the world, and the folly of expecting great things from it. He was *Cohereleth*, one gathered in from his wandrings, and gathered home to that God, from whom he had revolted. *Vanity of vanities, saith the penitent.* All true penitents are convicted of the vanity of the world, for they find it can do nothing to ease them of the burthen of sin, which they complain of.

2. They are the words of one that was wise, wiser than any; endued with extraordinary measures of wisdom; famous for it among his neighbours, who all sought unto him to hear his wisdom, and therefore a competent judge of this matter; not only wise as a prince, but wise as a preacher, and preachers have need of wisdom to win souls.

3. He was one that made it his business to do good, and to use wisdom aright. Because he was himself wise, but knew he had not his wisdom for himself, no more than he had it from himself, he still taught the people that knowledge which he had found useful to

himself, and hoped might be so to them too. It is the interest of princes to have their people well taught in religion, and no disparagement to them to teach them themselves the good knowledge of the Lord, but their duty to encourage those whose office it is to teach them, and to speak comfortably to them, *2 Chron. xxx. 22.* Let not the people, the common people be despised; no, not by the wisest and greatest, as either unworthy, or incapable of good knowledge; even those that are well taught, have need to be still taught, that they may grow in knowledge.

4. He took a great deal of pains and care to do good, designing to teach the people knowledge, he did not put them off with any thing that came next to hand; because they were inferior people; and he a very wise man, but considering the worth of the souls he preached to, and the weight of the subject he preached on; he gave good heed to what he read and heard from others, that having stocked himself well, he might bring out of his treasury things new and old. He gave good heed to what he spoke and wrote himself, and was choice and exact in it; all he did was elaborate. (1.) He chose the most profitable way of preaching, by proverbs, or short sentences, which would be more easily apprehended and remembered than long and laboured periods. (2.) He did not content himself with a few parables, or wise sayings, and repeat them again and again but he furnished himself with many proverbs, a great variety of grave discourses, that he might have something to say on every occasion. (3.) He did not only give them such observations as were obvious and trite, but he sought out such as were surprizing and uncommon; he digged into the mines of knowledge, and did not only pick up what lay on the surface. (4.) He did not deliver his heads and observations at random, as they came to mind, but methodized them and set them in order, that they might appear in more strength and lustre.

5. He put what he had to say in such a dress as he thought would be most pleasing: He sought to find out acceptable words, words of delight, *ver. 10.* he took care that good matter might not be spoiled by an ill stile; and by the ungratefulness and incongruity of the expression. Ministers should study not for big words, or fine words, but acceptable words, such as are likely to please men for their good to edification, *1 Cor. x. 33.* They that would win souls, must contrive how to win upon them with words fitly spoken.

6. That which he did write for our instruction is of unquestionable certainty, and what we may rely upon: That which was written was upright and sincere, according to the real sentiment of the penman, even words of truth, the exact representation of the thing as it is. Those are sure not to miss their way that are guided by these words. What good will acceptable words do us if they be not upright, and words of truth? Most are for smooth things that flatter them, rather than right things that direct them, *Isa. xxx. 10.* but to those that understand themselves and their own interest, words of truth will always be acceptable words.

7. That which this and other holy men wrote, will be of great use and advantage to us, especially being inculcated upon us by the exposition of it, *ver. 11.* Here observe, (1.) A double benefit accruing to us by divine truths, if duly applied and improved, they are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness. They are of use, 1. To excite us to our duty; they are as goads to the ox that draws the plough, putting him forward when he is dull, and quickning him to mend his pace. The truths of God prick men to the heart, *Acts ii. 37.* and put them upon bethinking themselves, when they trifle and grow remiss, and exerting themselves with more vigour in their work. While our good affections are so apt as they are to grow flat and cool, we have need of these goads. 2. To engage us to persevere in our duty: they are as nails to those that are wavering and inconstant, to fix them to that which is good; they are as goads to such as are dull and draw back, and nails to such as are desultory and draw aside; means to establish the heart and confirm good resolutions, that we may not sit loose to our duty, nor ever be taken off from it, but that what good there is in us may be as a nail fastened in a sure place, *Ezra ix. 8.* (2.) A double way of communicating divine truths in order to these benefits. 1. By the scriptures, as the standing rule, the words of the wise, i. e. of the prophets, who are called wise men, *Matth. xxiii. 34.* These we have in black and white, and may have recourse to them at any time, and make use of them as goads and as nails; by them we may teach ourselves, let but them come with pungency and power to the soul, let the impressions of them be deep and durable and they will make us wise to salvation. 2. By the ministry, to make the words of the wise more profitable to us, it is appointed that they should be impressed and fastned by the masters of assemblies. Solemn assemblies for religious worship are an ancient divine institution, intended for the honour of God and the edification of his church, and are not only serviceable but necessary to those ends. There must be masters of these assemblies, who are Christ's ministers, and as such are to preside in them, to be God's mouth to the people and theirs to God. Their business is to fasten the words of the wise, and drive them as nails to the head, in order to which the word of God is likewise as a hammer, *Jer. xxiii. 29.*

8. That which is written and thus recommended to us, is of divine original: Though it comes to us through various hands, many

many wise men and many masters of assemblies, yet it is given by one and the same shepherd, the great shepherd of Israel, that leadeth Joseph like a flock, Psal. lxxx. 1. God is that one shepherd, whose good Spirit indited the scriptures, and assists the masters of the assemblies in opening and applying the scriptures. These words of the wise are the true sayings of God, on which we may rest our souls; from that one Shepherd all ministers must receive what they deliver, and speak according to the light of the written word.

9. The sacred inspired writings, if we will but make use of them, are sufficient to guide us in the way to true happiness, and we need not, in the pursuit of that, to toil ourselves with the search of other writings, *ver.* 12. And further, nothing now remains but to tell thee, that of making many books there is no end, i.e. 1. Of writing many books: if what I have written serve not to convince thee of the vanity of the world and the necessity of being religious, neither wouldst thou be convinced if I should write never so much. If the end be not attained in the use of those books of scripture which God has blessed us with, neither should we obtain the end if we had twice as many more; nay, if we had so many as that the whole world could not contain them, *John* xxi. 6. and much study of them would but confound us, and would rather be a weariness to the flesh than any advantage to the soul; we have as much as God saw fit to give us, saw fit for us, and saw us fit for. Much less can it be expected that those who will not by these be admonished, should be wrought upon by other writings. Let men write never so many books for the conduct of human life, write till they have tired themselves with much study, they cannot give better instructions than those we have from the word of God. Or, 2. Of buying many books, making ourselves masters of them, and masters of what is in them by much study, still the desire of learning would be unsatisfied, it will give a man indeed the best entertainment and the best accomplishment this world can afford him, but if we be not by these admonished of the vanity of the world, and human learning, among other things, and its insufficiency to make us happy without true piety, alas, there is no end of it, nor real benefit by it; it will weary the body, but never give the soul any true satisfaction. The great Mr. Selden subscribed to this, when he owned, that in all the books he had read he never found that on which he could rest his soul but in the holy scripture, especially *Tit.* ii. 11, 12. By these therefore let us be admonished.

13. ¶ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. 14. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

The great enquiry which Solomon prosecutes in this book is, *What is that good which the sons of men should do?* chap. ii. 3. What is the true way to true happiness? the certain means to attain our great end; he had in vain sought it among those things which the most of men are eager in pursuit of, but here at length he has found it, by the help of that discovery which God anci-

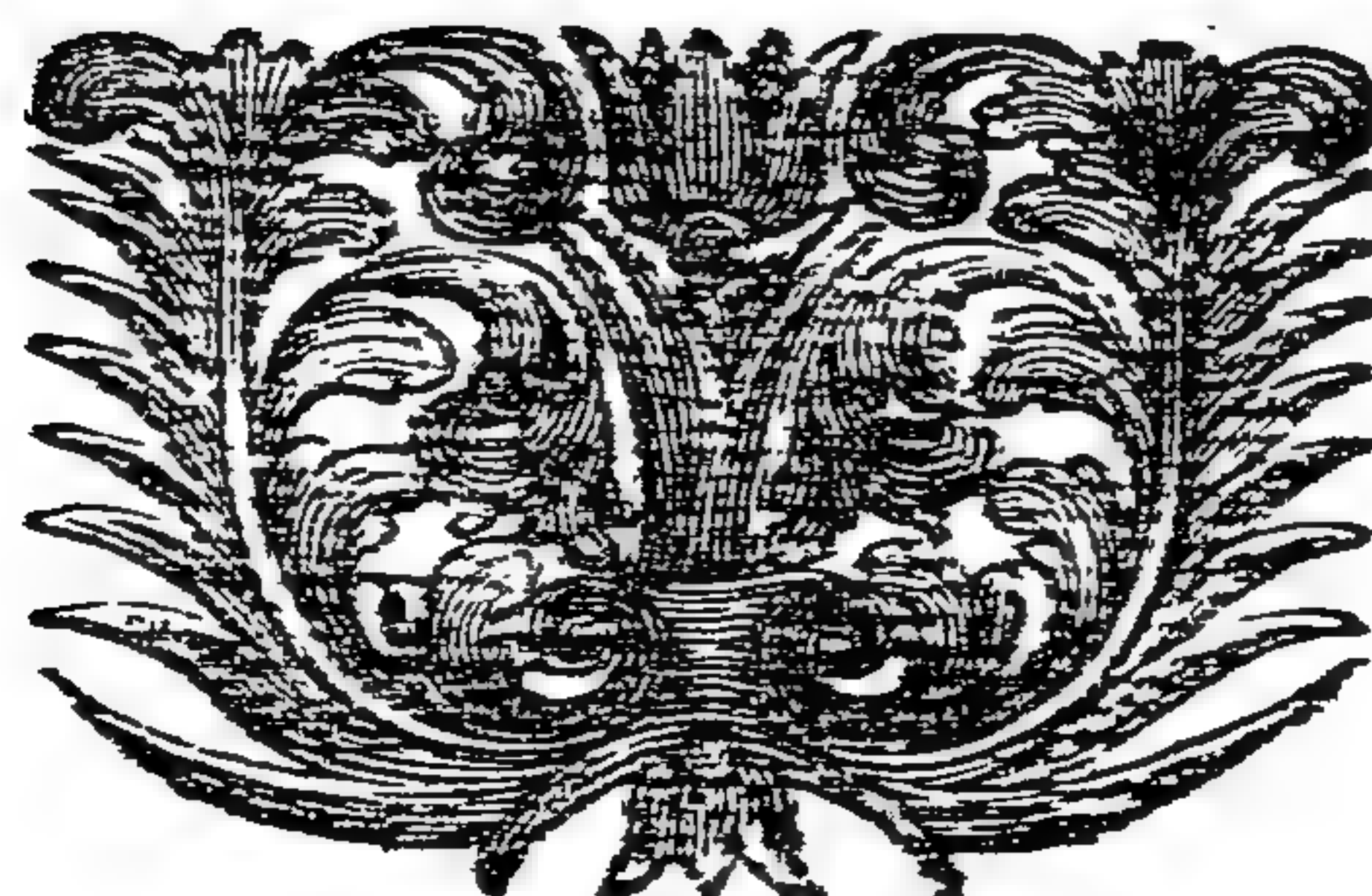
ently made to man, *Job* xxviii. 28. that serious godliness is the only way to true happiness. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, the return entered upon the writ of enquiry, the result of this diligent search, you shall have all I have been driving at in two words. He doth not say, *do you hear it*, but, *let us hear it*, for preachers must themselves be hearers of that word which they preach to others; must hear it, as from God; those are teachers by the halves who teach others and not themselves, *Rom.* ii. 21. Every word of God is pure and precious, but some are worthy of more special remark, as this here; the Masorites begin it with a capital letter, as that *Deut.* vi. 4. Solomon himself puts a *nota bene* before it, demanding attention, in these words, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.* Observe here,

1. The summary of religion. Setting aside all matters of doubtful disputation, to be religious is to *fear God and keep his commandments.* (1.) The root of religion is the fear of God reigning in the heart; a reverence of his majesty, a deference to his authority, and a dread of his wrath: *Fear God*, i. e. worship God, give him the honour due to his name, in all the instances of true devotion, inward and outward. See *Rev.* xiv. 7. (2.) The rule of religion is the law of God revealed in the scriptures. Our fear toward God must be taught by his commandments, *Isa.* xxix. 13. and those we must keep and carefully observe. Wherever the fear of God is uppermost in the heart, there will be a *respect to all his commandments*, and care to keep them. In vain do we pretend to fear God, if we do not make conscience of our duty to him.

2. The vast importance of it: *This is the whole of man*; it is all his business and all his blessedness: our whole duty is summed up in this, and our whole comfort is bound up in this. It is the concern of every man, and ought to be his chief and continual care; it is the common concern of all men, of their whole time. It is nothing to a man whether he be rich or poor, high or low, but it is the main matter, it is all in all, to a man to fear God and do as he bids him.

3. A powerful inducement to this, *ver.* 14. We shall see of what mighty consequence it is to us that we be religious, if we consider the account we must every one of us shortly give of ourselves to God; thence he argued against a voluptuous and vicious life, *chap.* xi. 9. and here for a religious life: *God shall bring every work into judgment.* Note, 1. There is a judgment to come, in which every man's eternal state will be finally determined. 2. God himself will be the Judge, God-man will, not only because he has a right to judge, but because he is perfectly fit for it; infinitely wise and just. 3. *Every work* will then be brought into judgment, will be enquired into, and called over again. It will be a day to bring to remembrance every thing done in the body. 4. The great thing to be then judged of concerning every work, is whether it be good or evil, conformable to the will of God, or a violation of it. 5. Even *secret things*, both good and evil, will be brought to light, and brought to account in the judgment of the great day, *Rom.* ii. 16. there is no good work, no ill work hid, but shall then be made manifest. 6. In consideration of the judgment to come, and the strictness of that judgment, it highly concerns us now to be very strict in our walkings with God, that we may give up our account with joy.

The end of the book of ECCLESIASTES.



AN EXPOSITION

OF THE

Song of Solomon,

With Practical Observations.

All scripture, we are sure, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for the support and advancement of the interests of his kingdom among men, and it is never the less so for there being found in it some things dark, and hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest to their own destruction. In our belief, both of the divine extraction and of the spiritual exposition of this book, we are confirmed by the ancient, constant, and concurring testimony, both of the church of the Jews, to whom were committed the oracles of God, and who never made any doubt of the authority of this book, and of the Christian church, which happily succeeds them in that trust and honour. 1. It must be confessed, on the one hand, that if he that barely reads this book, be asked, as the eunuch was, Understandest thou what thou readest? he will have more reason than he had to say, How can I except some man shall guide me? The books of scripture history and prophecy are very like one another, but this Song of Solomon's is very unlike the songs of his father David; here is not the name of God in it, it is never quoted in the New Testament, we find not in it any expressions of natural religion, or pious devotion, no, nor is it introduced by vision, or any of the marks of immediate revelation: it seems as hard as any part of scripture to be made a savour of life unto life, nay, and to those who come to the reading of it with carnal minds and corrupt affections it is in danger of being made a savour of death unto death: it is a flower out of which they extract poison; and therefore the Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read it till they were thirty years old, lest by the abuse of that which is most pure and sacred (*horrendum dictu!*) the flames of lust should be kindled with fire from heaven, which is intended for the altar only. But, 2. It must be confessed, on the other hand, that with the help of the many faithful guides we have, for the understanding of this book, it appears to be a very bright and powerful ray of heavenly light, admirably fitted to excite pious and devout affections in holy souls, to draw out their desires towards God, to increase their delight in him, and improve their acquaintance and communion with him. It is an allegory, the letter of which kills those who rest in that and look no further, but the spirit of which giveth life, 2 Cor. iii. 6. John vi. 63: It is a parable, which makes divine things more difficult to those who do not love them, but more plain and pleasant to those that do, Matth. xiii. 14, 16. experienced christians here find a counterpart of their experiences, and to them it is intelligible, while they neither understand it nor relish it, who have no part or lot in the matter. It is a song, an Epithalamium, or nuptial song, wherein by the expressions of love between a bridegroom and his bride, is set forth and illustrated the mutual affections that pass between God and a distinguished remnant of mankind. It is a pastoral, the bride and bridegroom, for the more lively representation of humility and innocence, are brought in as a shepherd and his shepherdess. Now, (1.) This song might easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Jewish church, for whose use it was first composed, and was so taken, as appears by the Chaldee paraphrase and the most ancient Jewish expositors. God betrothed the people of Israel to himself, he entered into covenant with them, and it was a marriage covenant. He had given abundant proofs of his love to them, and required of them that they should love him with all their heart and soul. Idolatry was often spoken of as spiritual adultery, and doting upon idols, to prevent which this song was penned, representing the complacency God took in Israel, and which Israel ought to take in God, and encouraging them to continue faithful to him, though he might seem sometimes to withdraw and hide himself from them, and to wait for the further manifestation of himself in the promised Messiah. (2.) It may more easily be taken in a spiritual sense by the Christian church, because the condescensions and communications of divine love appear more rich and free under the gospel, than they did under the law, and the communion between heaven and earth more familiar. God sometimes spoke of himself as the husband of the Jewish church, Isa. lxiv. 5. Hos. ii. 16. 19. and rejoiced in it as his bride, Isa. lxii. 4, 5: But more frequently is Christ represented as the bridegroom of his church, Matth. xxv. 1. Rom. vii. 4. 2 Cor. xi. 2. Eph. v. 32. and the church as the bride, the Lamb's wife, Rev. xix. 7. xxi. 2. 9. Pursuant to this metaphor, Christ and the church in general, Christ and particular believers, are here discoursing with abundance of mutual esteem and endearment. The best key to this book is the 45th psalm, which we find applied to Christ in the New Testament, and therefore this ought to be so too. It requires some pains to find out what may probably be the meaning of the holy Spirit in the several parts of this book; as David's songs are many of them level to the capacity of the meanest, and there are shallows in them in which a lamb may wade; so this of Solomon's will exercise the capacities of the most learned, and there are depths in it in which an elephant may swim. But when the meaning is found out, it will be of admirable use to excite pious and devout affections in us; and the same truths which are plainly laid down in other scriptures, when they are extracted out of this, come to the soul with a more pleasing power. When we apply ourselves to the study of this book, we must not only, with Moses and Joshua, put off our shoe from off our foot, and even forget that we have bodies, because the place where we stand is holy ground; but we must, with John, come up hither, must spread our wings, take a noble flight and soar upwards, till, by faith and holy love we enter into the holiest, for this is no other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

C H A P. I.

In this chapter, after the title of the book, ver. 1. we have Christ and his church, Christ and a believer, expressing their esteem for each other. (1.) The bride, the church, speaks to the Bridegroom, ver. 2, 3, 4. to the daughters of Jerusalem, ver. 5, 6. and then to the Bridegroom, ver. 7. (2.) Christ the Bridegroom speaks in answer to the complaints and request of his spouse, ver. 8, — 11. (3.) The church expresseth the great value she has for Christ, and the delights she takes in communion with him, ver. 12, — 14. (4.) Christ commends the church's beauty, ver. 15. And, (5.) The church returns the commendation, ver. 16, 17. Where there is a fire of true love to Christ in the heart, this will be of use to blow it up into a flame.

I. THE song of songs, which is Solomons.

We have here the title of this book, shewing,

1. The nature of it. It is a *song*, that it might the better answer the intention, which is to stir up the affections, and to heat them, which poetry will be very instrumental to do. The subject is pleasing, and therefore fit to be treated of in a song, in singing of which we may make melody with our hearts unto the Lord. It is evangelical, and gospel times should be times of joy, for gospel-grace puts a new song into our mouths, *Psal. xcvi. 1.*

2. The dignity of it: it is the *song of songs*, i. e. a most excellent song; not only above any human composition, nor above all the other songs which Solomon penned, but even above any other of the scripture songs, as having more of Christ in it.

3. The penman of it; it is Solomon's: it is not the song of fools, as many of the songs of love are, but the song of the wisest of men: nor can any man give a better proof of his wisdom than to celebrate the love of God to mankind, and to excite his own and others love to God. Solomon's songs were a thousand and five, *1 Kings iv. 32.* those that were of other subjects are lost, but this of seraphick love remains and will to the end of time. Solomon, like his father, was addicted to poetry, and which way soever a man's genius lies he should endeavour to honour God and edify the church with it. One of Solomon's names was Jedidiah, *beloved of the Lord, 2 Sam. xii. 25.* and none so fit to write of the Lord's love as he that had himself so great an interest in it; none of all the apostles wrote so much of love as he that was himself the beloved disciple and lay in Christ's bosom. Solomon, as a king, had great affairs to mind and manage, which took up much of his thoughts and time, yet he found heart and leisure for this and other religious exercises. Men of business ought to be devout men, and not think their business will excuse them from that which is every man's great business to keep up communion with God. It is not certain when Solomon penned this sacred song; some think he penned it after he recovered himself, by the grace of God, from his backslidings, as a further proof of his repentance, and as if, by doing good to many with this song, he would atone for the hurt he had, perhaps, done with loose, vain, amorous songs, when he *loved many strange wives*; now he turned his wit the right way. It is more probable he penned it in the beginning of his time, while he kept close to God, and kept up his communion with him, and perhaps he put this song, with his father's psalms, into the hands of the chief musician for the service of the temple, not without a key to it for the right understanding of it. Some think it was penned upon occasion of his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, but that is uncertain; the tower of Lebanon, which is mentioned in this book, *chap. vii. 4.* was not built, as is supposed, till long after that marriage. We may reasonably think, when in the height of his prosperity he *loved the Lord, 1 Kings iii. 3.* he thus *serv'd him with joyfulness and gladness of heart in the abundance of all things.* It may be rendered, *The song of songs which is concerning Solomon,* who, as the son and successor of David, on whom the covenant of royalty was entailed, as the founder of the temple, and one that excelled in wisdom and wealth, was a type of Christ, in whom are *hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,* and yet is a greater than Solomon; it is a song concerning him. It is here fitly placed after Ecclesiastes, for when, by that book, we are thoroughly convinced of the vanity of the creature, and its insufficiency to satisfy us, and make a happiness for us, we shall be quickned to seek for happiness in the love of Christ, and that true transcendent pleasure which is to be found only in communion with God through him. The voice in the wilderness that was to prepare Christ's way, cried, *All flesh is grass.*

4. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine. 5. Because of the favour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. 6. Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the

upright love thee. 5. I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. 6. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mothers children were angry with me, they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept.

The spouse, in this dramatick poem, is here first introduced addressing herself to the Bridegroom, and then to the daughters of Jerusalem.

1. To the Bridegroom; not giving him any name or title, but beginning abruptly, *Let him kiss me*; like Mary Magdalen to the supposed Gardener, *John xxi. 25. If thou have born him hence*; meaning Christ, but not naming him; the heart had been before taken up with the thoughts of him; and to this relative those thoughts were the antecedent, that good matter which the heart was inditing, *Psal. xlv. 1.* And they that are full of Christ themselves are ready to think others should be so too.

Two things the spouse desires, and pleaseth herself with the thoughts of:

1. The Bridegroom's friendship; *ver. 2. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth*, i. e. be reconciled to me, and let me know that he is so, let me have the tokens of his favour. Thus the Old Testament church desired Christ's manifesting himself in the flesh, to be no longer under the law as a school-master, and that dispensation of bondage and terror, but to receive the communications of divine grace in the gospel, in which God is reconciling the world unto himself, binding up and healing what by the law was torn and smitten; as the mother kisseth the child that she has chidden. Let him no longer send to me, but come himself; no longer speak by angels and prophets, but let me have the words of his own mouth, those *gracious words*, *Luke iv. 22.* which will be to me as the *kisses of his mouth*, sure tokens of reconciliation, as Esau's kissing Jacob was. All gospel duty is summed up in our kissing the Son, *Psal. ii. 12.* so all gospel grace is summed up in his kissing us, as the father of the prodigal's kissing him when he returned a penitent. It is a kiss of peace. Kisses are opposed to wounds, *Prov. xxvii. 6.* so are the kisses of grace to the wounds of the law. Thus all true believers earnestly desire the manifestations of Christ's love to their souls; they desire no more to make them happy but the assurances of his favour, the lifting up the light of his countenance upon them, *Psal. iv. 4, 6, 7.* and the knowledge of that love of his which passeth knowledge: this is the one thing they desire, *Psal. xxvii. 4.* They are ready to welcome the manifestations of Christ's love to their souls by his Spirit, and to return them in the humble professions of love to him, and complacency in him above all. "*The fruit of his lips is peace, Isa. lvii. 19.*" Let him give me ten thousand kisses, whose very fruition makes "me desire him the more, and whereas all other pleasures sour and "wither by using, those of his Spirit become more delightful." So bishop Reynolds.

She gives several reasons for this desire.

(1.) Because of the great esteem she had for his love: *Thy love is better than wine.* Wine makes glad the heart, revives the drooping spirits and exhilarates them, but gracious souls take more pleasure in loving Christ, and being loved of him in the fruits and gifts of his love, and in the pledges and assurances of it, than any man ever took in the most exquisite delights of sense, and it is more reviving to them than ever the richest cordial was to one ready to faint. Note, 1. Christ's love is in itself, and in account of all the saints more valuable and desirable than the best entertainments this world can give. 2. Those only may expect the kisses of Christ's mouth, and the comfortable tokens of his favour, who prefer his love before all the delights of the children of men; would rather forego those delights than forfeit his favour, and take more pleasure in spiritual joys than in any bodily refreshments whatsoever. Observe here the change of the person, *let him kiss me*, there she speaks of him as absent, or, as if she was afraid to speak to him; but in the next words she sees him near at hand, and therefore directs her speech to him, *thy love, thy loves*, (so the word is) I so earnestly desire, because I highly esteem it.

(2.) Because of the diffusive fragrantcy of his love, and the fruits of it, *ver. 3. Because of the favour of thy good ointment*, i. e. the agreeableness and acceptableness of thy graces and comforts to all that rightly understand both them and themselves, *thy name is as ointment poured forth*, i. e. thou art so, and all that whereby thou hast made thyself known; thy very name is precious to all the saints, it is an ointment and perfume which rejoices the heart. The unfolding of Christ's name is as the opening of a box of precious ointment which the room is filled with the odor of; the preaching of his gospel was the *manifesting of the favour of his knowledge in every place*, *2 Cor. ii. 14.* The Spirit was the *oil of gladness* wherewith Christ was anointed, *Heb. i. 9.* and all true believers have that *unction*, *1 John ii. 27.* so that he is precious to them, and they to him, and one to another. A good name is as *precious ointment*, but Christ's name is more fragrant than any other. Wisdom, like oil, *makes the face to shine*, but the Redeemer outshines

shines in beauty all others. The name of Christ is not now like ointment sealed up, as it had been long, *ask not after my name, for it is secret*, but like ointment poured forth; which notes both the freeness and fulness of the communications of his grace by the gospel.

(3.) Because of the general affection that all holy souls have to him: *Therefore do the virgins love thee*. It is Christ's love shed abroad in our hearts that draws them out in love to him; all that are pure from the corruptions of sin, that preserve the chastity of their own spirits, and are true to the vows by which they have devoted themselves to God, that not only suffer not their affections to be violated, but cannot bear so much as to be solicited by the world and the flesh, those are the virgins that love Jesus Christ, and follow him whithersoever he goes, Rev. xiv. 3. And because Christ is the darling of all the pure in heart, let him be ours, and let our desire be towards him, and towards the kisses of his mouth.

2. The Bridegroom's fellowship, ver. 4. Observe here,

(1.) Her petition for divine grace: *Draw me*. This implies sense of distance from him; desire of union with him; draw me to thyself, draw me nearer, draw me home to thee. She had prayed that he would draw nigh to her, ver. 2. in order to that she prays, that he would draw her nigh to him. *Draw me*, not only with the moral swasion which there is in the fragrancy of the good ointments, not only with the attractives of that name, which is as ointment poured forth, but with supernatural grace, with the cords of a man, and the bands of love, Hos. xi. 4. Christ has told us, that none come to him but such as the Father draws, John vi. 44. We are not only weak and cannot come of our selves any further than we are helped, but we are naturally backward and averse to come, and therefore must pray for those influences and operations of the Spirit, by the power of which we are, of unwilling, made willing, Psal. cx. 3. *Draw me*, else I move not; over-power the world and the flesh that would draw me from thee. We are not driven to Christ, but drawn in such a way as is agreeable to rational creatures.

(2.) Her promise to improve that grace: *Draw me*, and then *we will run after thee*. See how the doctrine of special and effectual grace consists with our duty, and is a powerful engagement and encouragement to it, and yet reserves all the glory of all the good that is in us to God only. Observe, 1. The flowing forth of the soul after Christ, and its ready compliance with him is the effect of his grace; we could not run after him if he did not draw us, 2 Cor. iii. 5. Phil. iv. 13. 2. The grace which God gives us we must diligently improve; when Christ, by his Spirit, draws us, we must, with our spirits, run after him. As God saith, *I will*, and *you shall*, Ezek. xxxvi. 27. so we must say, *Thou shalt*, and *we will*; thou shalt work in us both to will and to do, and therefore we will work out our own salvation, Phil. ii. 12, 13. Not only we will walk, but we will run after thee, which notes eagerness of desire, readiness of affection, vigour of pursuit, and swiftness of motion. *When thou shalt enlarge my heart*, then *I will run the way of thy commandment*, Psal. cxix. 32. when thy right hand upholds me, then my soul follows hard after thee, Psal. lxiii. 8. when with loving kindness to us he draws us, Jer. xxxi. 3. we with loving kindness to him must run after him, Isa. xl. 31. Observe the difference between the petition and the promise, draw me and then we will run. When Christ pours out his Spirit upon the church in general, which is his bride, all the members of it do from thence receive enlivening, quickening influences, and are made to run to him with more cheerfulness, Isa. lv. 5. Or, draw me (saith the believing soul) and then I will not only follow thee myself as fast as I can, but will bring all mine along with me, *we will run after thee*, I and the virgins that love thee, ver. 3. I and all that I have any interest in, or influence upon, *I and my house*, Josh. xxiv. 15. I and the transgressors, whom I will teach thy ways, Psal. li. 13. Those that put themselves forth, in compliance with divine grace, their zeal will provoke many, 2 Cor. ix. 2. Those that are lively will be active; when Philip was drawn to Christ he drew Nathanael, and they will be exemplary, and so will win those that would not be won by the word.

(3.) The immediate answer that was given to this prayer: *The King hath drawn me, hath brought me into his chambers*. It is not so much an answer fetched by faith from the word of Christ's grace, as an answer fetched by experience from the workings of his grace. If we observe, as we ought, the returns of prayer, we may find, that sometimes while we are yet speaking Christ hears, Isa. lxv. 24. The Bridegroom is a King, so much the more wonderful is his condescension in the invitations and entertainments that he gives us, and so much the greater reason have we to accept of them, and to run after him. God is the King that hath made the marriage-supper for his Son, Matth. xxii. 2. and brings in even the poor and the maimed, and even the most shy and bashful are compelled to come in. They that are drawn to Christ are brought not only into his courts, into his palaces, Psal. xlv. 15. but into his presence-chamber, where his secret is with them, Psal. xxv. 14. where he is free with them, John xiv. 21. and where they are safe in his pavilion, Psal. xxvii. 5. Isa. xxvi. 20. Those that wait at

wisdom's gates shall be made to come, so the word is, *into her chambers*, they shall be led into truth and comfort.

(4.) The wonderful complacency which the spouse takes in the honour which the king put upon her. Being brought into the chamber, 1. We have what we would have; our desires are crowned with unspeakable delights; all our griefs vanish, and *we will be glad and rejoice*; If a day in the courts, much more an hour in the chambers, is better than a thousand, than ten thousand elsewhere. They that are through grace brought into covenant and communion with God, have reason to go on their way rejoicing, as the eunuch, Acts viii. 39. and that joy will enlarge our heart, and be our strength, Neh. viii. 9. 2. All our joy shall centre in God. *We will rejoice*, not in the ointments, or the chambers, but in thee. It is God only that is our exceeding joy, Psal. xliii. 4. We have no joy but in Christ; and which we are indebted to him for. *Gaudium in Domino* was the ancient salutation, and *salus in Domino semperiterna*. 3. We will retain the relish and savour of this kindness of thine, and never forget it; *we will remember thy loves more than wine*; not only thy love it self, ver. 2. but the very remembrance of it, shall be more grateful to us than the strongest cordial to the spirits, or the most palatable liquor to the taste. We will remember to give thanks for thy love, and it shall make more durable impressions upon us than any thing in this world.

(5.) The communion which a gracious soul hath with all the saints in this communion with Christ. In the chambers, to which we are brought, we not only meet with him, but meet with one another, 1 John i. 7. for the upright love thee; the congregation, the generation of the upright love thee; whatever others do, all that are Israelites indeed, and faithful to God, will love Jesus Christ: Whatever differences of apprehension and affection there may be among christians in other things, this they are all agreed in, Jesus Christ is precious to them: *The upright* here are the same with the virgins, ver. 3. All that remember his love more than wine, will love him with a superlative love: Nor is any love acceptable to Christ, but the love of the upright, love in sincerity, Eph. vi. 24.

2. The spouse applies her self to the daughters of Jerusalem, ver. 5, 6. The church in general, being in distress, speaks to particular churches to guard them against the danger they were in, of being offended at the church's sufferings, 1 Thess. iii. 3. Or, the believer speaks to those that were professors at large in the church, but not of it; or to weak christians, babes in Christ, that labour under much ignorance, infirmity, and mistake, not perfectly instructed, and yet willing to be taught in the things of God. She observed these by-standers look disdainfully upon her, because of her blackness, in respect both of sins and sufferings, upon the account of which, they thought she had little reason to expect the kisses she wished for, ver. 2. or to expect that they should join with her in her joys, ver. 4. She therefore endeavours to remove this offence; she owns she is black; guilt blackens; the heresies, scandals, and offences that happen in the church, make her black; and the best saints have their failings; sorrow blackens; that seems to be especially meant; the church is often in a low condition, mean and poor, and appearing despicable; her beauty sullied, and her face soul with weeping; she is in mourning weeds, clothed with sackcloth; as the Nazarites that were become blacker than a coal, Lam. iv. 8.

Now to take off this offence,

1. She asserts her own comeliness notwithstanding, ver. 5. *I am black, but comely*; black as the tents of Kedar, in which the shepherds lived, which were very coarse, and never whitened, weather-beaten, and discoloured by long use; but comely as the curtains of Solomon, the furniture of whose rooms, no doubt, was sumptuous and rich, in proportion to the stateliness of his houses. The church is sometimes black with persecution, but comely in patience, constancy, and consolation; and never the less amiable in the eyes of Christ. Black, in the account of men, but comely, in God's esteem. Black, in some that are a scandal to her, but comely, in others that are sincere, and are an honour to her. True believers are black in themselves, but comely in Christ, with the comeliness that he puts upon them. Black outwardly, for the world knows them not, but all glorious within, Psal. xlv. 13. St. Paul was weak, and yet strong, 2 Cor. xii. 10. and so the church, black, and yet comely; a believer, a sinner, and yet a saint; his own righteousnesses are as filthy rags, but he is clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the people of Israel's blackness, when they made the golden calf, and their comeliness, when they repented of it.

2. She gives an account how she came to be so black: The blackness was not natural, but contracted, and was owing to the hard usage that had been given her. *Look not upon me so scornfully, because I am black*. We must take heed with what eye we look upon the church, especially when she is in black. *Thou shouldest not have looked upon the day of thy brother*, the day of his affliction, Obad. 12. Be not offended; for,

(1.) *I am black*, by reason of my sufferings: *The sun hath looked upon me*. She was fair and comely, whiteness was her proper colour, but she got this blackness by the burthen and heat of the day, which she was forced to bear. She was sun-burnt, scorched with tribu-

tribulation and persecution, *Matt. xiii. 6, 21.* and the greatest beauties, if exposed to the weather, are soonest tanned. Observe how she mitigates her troubles; she doth not say, as Jacob, *Gen. xxxi. 40. in the day the drought consumed me, only, the sun has looked upon me*; for it becomes not God's suffering people to make the worst of their sufferings. But what was the matter? 1. She fell under the displeasure of those of her own house; *my mother's children were angry with me*; she was in perils by false brethren; her foes were those of her own house, *Matt. x. 21.* brethren by nature, as men; by profession, members of the same sacred corporation; the children of the church her mother, but not of God her Father; they were angry with her: The Samaritans that claimed kindred to the Jews, were vexed at any thing that tended to the prosperity of Jerusalem, *Neh. ii. 10.* Note, It is no new thing for the people of God to fall under the anger of their own mother's children. *It was thou, a man, mine equal, Psalm lv. 12, 13.* This makes the trouble the more irksome and grievous; from such it is taken unkindly; and the anger of such is implacable; *a brother offended is hard to be won.* 2. They dealt very hardly with her: *They made me the keeper of the vineyards, i. e. (1.)* They seduced me to sin, drew me into false worships, to serve their gods, which was like dressing their vineyards, *keeping the vine of Sodom*; and they would not let me keep my own vineyard, serve my own God, and observe those pure worships which he gave me in charge, and which I do and ever will own for mine. These are the grievances which good people complain most of in a time of persecution, that their consciences are forced, and those that rule them with rigour say to their souls, *bow down, that we may go over, Isa. li. 23.* Or, (2.) They brought me into trouble, imposed that upon me which was toilsome, and burthensome, and very disgraceful; keeping the vineyards was base servile work, and very laborious, *Isa. lxi. 5.* her mother's children made her the drudge of the family: *Cursed be their anger for it was fierce, and their wrath for it was cruel.* The spouse of Christ has met with a great deal of hard usage.

(2.) My sufferings are such as I have deserved; for *my own vineyard have I not kept*: How unrighteous soever my brethren are in persecuting me, God is righteous in permitting them to do so; I am justly made a slavish keeper of mens vineyards, because I have been a careless keeper of the vineyards God hath intrusted me with. Slothful servants of God, are justly made to serve their enemies, *that they may know my services, and the service of the kings of the countries, 2 Chron. xii. 8. Deut. xxviii. 47, 48. Ezek. xx. 24.* Think not the worse of the ways of God for my sufferings, for I smart for my own folly. Note, When God's people are oppressed and persecuted, it becomes them to acknowledge their own sin to be the procuring cause of their troubles, especially their carelessness in keeping their vineyards, so that it has been like *the field of the slothful.*

7. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon: for why should I be as one that turneth aside by the flocks of thy companions? 8. ¶ If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed the kids beside the shepherds tents. 9. I have compared thee, O my love, to a company of horses in Pharaohs chariots. 10. Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold. 11. We will make thee borders of gold with studs of silver.

Here is, 1. The humble petition which the spouse presents to her beloved, the shepherds to the shepherd, the church, and every believer to Christ, for a more free and intimate communion with him. She turns from the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she had complained both of her sins and of her troubles, and looks up to heaven for relief and succour against both, *ver. 7.* Where observe, (1.) The title she gives to Christ, *O thou whom my soul loveth.* Note, It is the undoubted character of all true believers, that their souls love Jesus Christ, which intimates both the sincerity and the strength of their love; they love him with all their hearts; and they that do so, may come to him boldly, and may humbly plead it with him. (2.) The opinion she has of him as the good Shepherd of the sheep: She doubts not but he feeds his flock, and makes them rest at noon: Jesus Christ graciously provides both repast and repose for his sheep; they are not starved, but well fed; not scattered upon the mountains, but fed together; fed in green pastures; and in the hot time of the day, led by the still waters, and made to lie down under a cool refreshing shade. Is it with God's people a noon-time of outward troubles, inward conflicts? Christ hath rest for them, he carries them in his arms, *Isa. xl. 11.* (3.) Her request to him that she might be admitted into his society. *Tell me where thou feedest.* Those that would be told, that would be taught what they are concerned to know and do, must apply themselves to Jesus Christ, and beg of him to teach them, to tell them. *Tell me where to find thee, where I may*

have conversation with thee, where thou feedest and tendest thy flock, that there I may have some of thy company. Observe by the way, we should not in love to our friends and their company, tempt them, or urge them, to neglect their business, but desire such an enjoyment of them, as will consist with it, and rather, if we can, to join with them in their business, and help to forward it. *Tell me where thou feedest,* and there I will sit with thee, walk with thee, feed my flocks with thine, and not hinder thee, nor my self neither, but bring thy work with me. Note, They whose souls love Jesus Christ, earnestly desire to have communion with him, by his word, in which he speaks to us, and by prayer, in which we speak to him; and to share in the privileges of his flock; and we may learn, from the care he takes of his church, to provide convenient food and rest for it, how to take care of our own souls, which are our charge. (4.) The plea she useth for the enforcing of this request; *for why should I be as one that turneth aside by, or after, the flocks of thy companions,* that pretend to be so, but are really thy competitors and rivals with thee. Note, Turning aside from Christ after other lovers, is that which gracious souls dread and deprecate more than any thing else. Thou wouldst not have me to turn aside, no, nor to be as one that turneth aside; tell me then, O tell me, where I may be near thee, and I will never leave thee. 1. *Why should I lie under suspicion, and look as if I belonged to some other, and not to thee? Why should I be thought by the flocks of our companions,* to be a deserter from thee, and a retainer to some other shepherd. Good christians will be afraid of giving any occasion to those about them, to question their faith in Christ, and their love to him; they would not do any thing that looks like unconcernedness about their souls, or uncharitableness toward their brethren, or that favours of indifferency and disaffection to holy ordinances; and we should pray to God to direct us into, and keep us in the way of our duty, that we may not so much as seem to come short, *Heb. iv. 1.* 2. *Why should I lie in temptation to turn aside,* as I do while I am absent from thee? We should be earnest with God for a settled peace in communion with God, through Christ, that we may not be at waifs and strays, ready to be picked up by him that next passeth by.

2. The gracious answer which the bridegroom gives to this request, *ver. 8.* See how ready God is to answer prayer, especially prayers for instruction; even while she is yet speaking he hears. Observe, 1. How affectionately he speaks to her; *O thou fairest among women.* Note, Believing souls are fair in the eyes of the Lord Jesus above any other. Christ sees a beauty in holiness, whether we do or no. The spouse had called her self black, but Christ calls her fair. Those that are low in their own eyes, are so much the more amiable in the eyes of Jesus Christ. Blushing at their own deformity (saith Mr. Durham) is a chief part of their beauty. 2. How mildly he checks her for her ignorance, in these words, *If thou know not,* intimating that she might have known it, if it had not been her own fault: What! Dost thou not know where to find me and my flock? Compare Christ's answer to a like address of Philip's, *John xiv. 9. Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?* But, 3. With what tenderness he acquaints her where she might find him. If men say, *Lo, here is Christ, or, lo, he is there, believe them not, go not after them,* *Matt. xxiv. 23, 26.* But, (1.) *Walk in the way of good men,* *Prov. ii. 20.* follow the track, ask for the good old way, observe the footsteps of the flock, and go forth by them. It will not serve to sit still, and cry, Lord, shew me the way, but we must bestir our selves to enquire out the way; and we may find it, by looking which way the footsteps of the flock lead, what has been the practice of godly people all along, and let that be your practice, *Heb. vi. 12.* 1 *Cor. xi. 1.* (2.) Sit under the conduct of good ministers: *Feed thy self, and thy kids, beside the tents of the under-shepherds:* Bring thy charge with thee; (and it is probable, the custom was to commit the lambs and kids to the custody of the women, the shepherdesses) they shall all be welcome; the shepherds will be no hindrance to thee, as they were to Reuel's daughters, *Exod. ii. 17.* but helpers rather, and therefore abide by their tents. Note, Those that would have acquaintance and communion with Christ, must closely and conscientiously adhere to holy ordinances, must join themselves to his people, and attend to his ministers. Those that have the charge of families, must bring them with them to religious assemblies; let their kids, their children, their servants, have the benefit of the shepherds tents.

3. The high encomiums which the bridegroom gives of his spouse. To be given in marriage, in the Hebrew dialect is to be praised, *Psalm lxxviii. 63.* marg. so this spouse is here; her husband he praiseth this virtuous woman, *Prov. xxxi. 28.* he praiseth her as is usual in poems by similitudes. 1. He calls her his love, *ver. 9.* it is an endearing compellation, often used in this book; my friend, my companion, my familiar. 2. He compares her to a set of strong and stately horses in Pharaoh's chariots. Egypt was famous for the best horses, Solomon had his from thence, and Pharaoh, no doubt, had the choicest the country afforded for his own chariots: The church had complained of her own weakness, and the danger she was in of being made a prey of by her enemies; Fear not, saith Christ; *I have made thee like a company of horses, I have put strength into thee, as I have done into the horse, Job*

xxxix. 19. so that thou shalt with a gracious boldness *mock at fear*, and not be affrighted, like the lion, Prov. xxviii. 1. *The Lord has made thee as his goodly horse in the day of battle*, Zech. x. 3. *I have compared thee to my company of horses which triumphed over Pharaoh's chariots*, the holy angels, *horses of fire*, Hab. iii. 15. *Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses*; and see Isa. lxiii. 13. We are weak in our selves, but if Christ make us as horses, strong and bold, we need not fear what all the powers of darkness can do against us. 3. He admires the beauty and ornaments of her countenance, ver. 10. *Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels*, the attire of the head, curls of hair, or favourites, so some; or knots of ribbons; *thy neck also with chains*, such as persons of the first rank wear, *chains of gold*. The ordinances of Christ are the ornaments of the church; the graces, and gifts, and comforts of the Spirit, are the adorning of every believing soul, and beautify it; these render it *in the sight of God of great price*. The ornaments of the saints are many, but all orderly disposed in *rows and chains*, in which there is a mutual connexion with, and dependence upon each other. The beauty is not from any thing in themselves, from the neck, or from the cheeks, but from the ornaments with which they are set off. It was *comeliness which I put upon thee*, saith the Lord God, for we were born not only naked, but polluted, Ezek. xvi. 14.

4. His gracious purpose to add to her ornaments; for where God has given true grace, he will give more grace; *to him that hath, shall be given*. Is the church courageous in her resistance of sin, as the *horses in Pharaoh's chariots*? Is she comely in the exercise of grace, as *with rows of jewels*, and *chains of gold*? she shall be yet further beautified, ver. 11. *We will make the borders of gold*, inlaid or enameled *with studs of silver*; whatever is wanting, shall be made up, till the church, and every true believer, comes to be *perfect in beauty*; see Ezek. xvi. 14. This is here undertaken to be done by the concurring power of the three persons in the Godhead: *We will do it*, like that, Gen. i. 26. *Let us make man*; so let us now make him, and perfect his beauty: The same that is the author will be the finisher of the good work; and it cannot miscarry:

12. ¶ While the king *sitteth* at his table, my *spikenard* sendeth forth the smell thereof. 13. A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts. 14. My beloved is unto me as a cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-gedi. 15. Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair, thou hast doves eyes. 16. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant: also our bed is green. 17. The beams of our house are cedar, and our rafters of fir.

Here the conference is carried on between Christ and his spouse, and endearments mutually exchanged.

1. Believers take a great complacency in Christ, and in communion with him. *To you that believe, he is precious*, above any thing in this world, 1 Pet. ii. 7. Observe,

(1.) The humble reverence believers have for Christ as their sovereign, ver. 12. He is a King, in respect both of dignity and dominion; he wears the crown of honour, he bears the sceptre of power, both which are the unspeakable satisfaction of all his people. This King has his royal table spread in the gospel, in which is made for all nations a feast of fat things, Isa. xxv. 6. Wisdom hath furnished her table, Prov. ix. 1. He sits at this table to see his guests, Matt. xxii. 11. to see that nothing be wanting that is fit for them; he sups with them, and they with him, Rev. iii. 20. he hath fellowship with them, and rejoiceth in them; he sits at his table to bid them welcome, and to carve to them, as Christ brake the five loaves, and gave to his disciples, that they might distribute to the multitude: He sits there to receive petitions, as Ahasuerus admitted Esther's petition at the banquet of wine. He has promised to be present with his people in his ordinances always. Then believers do him all the honour they can, and study how to express their esteem of him, and gratitude to him, as Mary did, when she anointed his head with the ointment of spikenard that was very costly, one pound of it worth three hundred pence, and so fragrant, that the house was filled with the pleasing odour of it, John xii. 3. which story seems as if it were designed to refer to this passage, for Christ was then sitting at table. When good christians, in any religious duty, especially in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, where the King is pleased as it were to sit with us at his own table, have their graces exercised, their hearts broken by repentance, healed by faith, and enflamed with holy love and desire towards Christ, with joyful expectations of the glory to be revealed, then the *spikenard sends forth the smell thereof*, Christ is pleased to reckon himself honoured by it, and to accept of it as an instance of respect to him, as it was in the wise men of the East, who paid their homage to the new-born King of the Jews, by presenting to him *frankincense and myrrh*. The graces of God's Spirit in the hearts of believers are exceeding precious in themselves,

and pleasing to Christ, and his presence in ordinances draws them out into act and exercise. If he withdraw, graces wither and languish, as plants in the absence of the sun; if he approach, the face of the soul is renewed, as of the earth in the spring; and then it is time to bestir our selves, that we may not lose the gleam, not lose the gale; for nothing is done acceptably, but what grace doth, Heb. xii. 28.

(2.) The strong affection they have for Christ as their beloved, their well-beloved, ver. 13. Christ is not only beloved by all believing souls, but is their well-beloved, their best-beloved, their only beloved; he has that place in their hearts, which no rival can be admitted to, the innermost and uppermost place. Observe, (1.) How Christ is accounted of by all believers; he is *a bundle of myrrh*; and *a cluster of camphire*, something we may be sure; nay, every thing that is pleasant and delightful. The doctrine of his gospel, and the comforts of his Spirit are very refreshing to them, and they rest in his love; none of all the delights of sense are comparable to the spiritual pleasure they have in meditating on Christ, and enjoying him: There is a complicated sweetness in Christ, and an abundance of it; there is *a bundle of myrrh*, and *a cluster of camphire*; we are not straitened in him in whom there is *all fulness*. The word translated *camphire*, is *copper*, the same word that signifies an atonement or propitiation; Christ is *a cluster of merit and righteousness* to all believers; therefore he is dear to them, because *he is the propitiation for their sins*. Observe what a stress the spouse lays upon the application; *he is unto me*; and again, *unto me* all that is sweet, whatever he is to others, he is so to me; *he loved me, and gave himself for me*; is my Lord, and my God.

(2.) How he is accepted; *he shall lie all night between my breasts*, near my heart: Christ lays the beloved disciples in his bosom, why then should not they lay their beloved Saviour in their bosoms? why should not they embrace him with both arms, and hold him fast, with a resolution never to let him go? Christ must dwell in the heart, Eph. iii. 17. and, in order to that, the adulteries must be put from between the breasts, Hos. ii. 2. no pretender must have his place in the soul. He shall be as *a bundle of myrrh*, or perfumed bag, between my breasts, always sweet to me; or his effigies in miniature, his love-tokens, shall be hung between my breasts, according to the custom of those that are dear to each other: He shall not only be laid there for a while; but shall lie there, shall abide there.

2. Jesus Christ has a great complacency in his church, and in every true believer: They are amiable in his eyes, ver. 15. *Behold, thou art fair, my love*; and again, *behold, thou art fair*. He saith this, not to make her proud, humility is one principal ingredient in spiritual beauty; but, 1. To shew that there is a real beauty in holiness; that all that are sanctified are thereby beautified; they are truly fair. 2. That he takes a great delight in that good work which his grace hath wrought on the souls of believers; so that though they have their infirmities, whatever they think of themselves, and the world thinks of them, he thinks them fair. He calls them friends; the *hidden man of the heart*, in that which is not corruptible, is in the sight of God of great price, 1 Pet. iii. 4. 3. To comfort weak believers that are discouraged by their own blackness, let them be told again and again that they are fair. 4. To engage all that are sanctified to be very thankful for that grace which has made them fair, who by nature were deformed, and changed the Ethiopian's skin. One instance of the beauty of the spouse is here mentioned, that she *hath doves eyes*, as chap. iv. 1. Those are fair in Christ's account that have not the piercing eye of the eagle, but the pure and chaste eye of the dove; not like the hawk, who, when he soars upward, still has his eye upon the prey on earth; but a humble, modest eye, such an eye as discovers a simplicity and godly sincerity, and a dove-like innocency. Eyes enlightened and guided by the holy Spirit, that blessed Dove; weeping eyes, I did mourn as a dove, Ezek. vii. 16.

3. The church expresseth her value for Christ, and returns esteem for esteem, ver. 16. *Behold, thou art fair*. See how Christ and believers praise one another: Israel saith of God, *Who is like thee?* Exod. xv. 11. and God saith of Israel, *Who is like thee?* Deut. xxxiii. 29. Lord, saith the church, *Dost thou call me fair?* No; if we speak of strength, *thou art strong*, Job ix. 19. so, if of beauty, *thou art fair*: I am fair no otherwise, than as I have thine image stamped upon me; thou art the great original, I am but a faint and imperfect copy: I am but thine umbra, John i. 16. iii. 34. Thou art fair in thy self, and (which is more) pleasant to all that are thine. Many are fair enough to look at, and yet the sourness of their temper renders them unpleasant; but *thou art fair, yea, pleasant*: Christ is pleasant, as he is ours, in covenant with us, in relation to us: Thou art pleasant now, when the King sits at his table. Christ is always precious to believers; but, in a special manner pleasant, when they are admitted into communion with him, when they hear his voice, and see his face, and taste his love: *It is good to be here*.

Having expressed her esteem of her husband's person, the next (like a loving spouse, that is transported with joy for having disposed of her self so well) applauds the accommodations he had for her entertainment; his bed, his house, his rafters or galleries, ver. 16.

which may fitly be applied to those holy ordinances in which believers have fellowship with Jesus Christ, receive the tokens of his love, and return their pious and devout affections to him, increase their acquaintance with him, and improve their advantages by him. Now, 1. These she calls *ours*, Christ and believers having a joint-interest in them: As husband and wife are *heirs together*, 1 Pet. iii. 7. so believers are *joint-heirs with Christ*, Rom. viii. 17. They are his institutions, and their privileges; in them Christ and believers meet: She doth not call them mine, for a believer will own nothing as his, but what Christ shall have an interest in; nor thine, for Christ hath said, *All that I have is thine*, Luke xv. 31. all is *ours*, if we are Christ's: They that can by faith lay claim to Christ, may lay claim to all that is his. 2. These are the best of the kind. Doth the colour of the bed, and the furniture belonging to it, help to set it off? *Our bed is green*, a colour which, in a pastoral, is preferred before any other, because it is the colour of the fields and groves, where the shepherd's business and delight is: It is a refreshing colour, good for the eyes, and it notes fruitfulness: *I am like a green olive-tree*, Psalm lxxviii. 8. We are married to Christ, that we should bring forth fruit unto God, Rom. vii. 4. The beams of our house are cedar, ver. 17. which, probably, refers to the temple Solomon had lately built, for communion between God and Israel, which was of cedar, a strong sort of wood, sweet, durable, and which will never rot, typifying the firmness and continuance of the church, the gospel temple; the galleries for walking are of fir, or cypress, some sort of wood that was pleasing both to the sight and to the smell, intimating the delight which the saints take in walking with Christ, and conversing with him. Every thing in the covenant of grace (on which foot all their treaties are carried on) is very firm, very fine, and very fragrant.

C H A P. II.

In this chapter, (1.) Christ speaks both concerning himself, and concerning his church, ver. 1, 2. (2.) The church speaks, 1. Remembering the pleasure and satisfaction she had in communion with Christ, ver. 3, 4. 2. Entertaining her self with the present tokens of his favour, and taking care that nothing happen to intercept them, ver. 5,—7. 3. Triumphant in his approaches towards her, ver. 8, 9. 4. Repeating the gracious calls he had given her to go along with him a walking, invited by the pleasures of the returning spring, ver. 10,—13. out of her obscurity, ver. 14. and the charge he had given to the servants to destroy that which would be hurtful to his vineyard, ver. 15. 5. Rejoicing in her interest in him, ver. 16. 6. Longing for his arrival, ver. 17. They whose hearts are filled with love to Christ, and hope of heaven, know best what these things mean.

1. **I** Am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. 2. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

See here, 1. What Christ is pleased to compare himself to; and he condescends very much in the comparison; he that is the Son of the Highest, the bright and morning Star, calls and owns himself the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys, to express his presence with his people in this world, the easiness of their access to him, and the beauty and sweetness which they find in him; and to teach them to adorn themselves with him, as shepherds and shepherdesses, when they appeared gay, were decked with roses and lilies, garlands and chaplets of flowers. The rose, for beauty and fragrantcy, is the chief of flowers, and our Saviour prefers the clothing of the lily before that of Solomon in all his glory. Christ is the rose of Sharon, where, probably, the best roses grew, and in most plenty; the rose of the field, so some; noting that the gospel salvation is a common salvation; it lies open to all; whoever will, may come and gather the rose-buds of privileges and comforts that grow in the covenant of grace; he is not a rose locked up in a garden, but all may come and receive benefit by him, and comfort in him. He is a lily for whiteness, a lily of the valleys for sweetness, for those we call so are a strong perfume. He is a lily of the valleys, or low places, in his humiliation, exposed to injury; humble souls see most beauty in him; whatever he is to others, to them that are in the valleys he is a lily. He is the rose, the lily; there is none but he; whatever excellency is in Christ, it is in him singularly, and in the highest degree.

2. What he is pleased to compare his church to, ver. 2. 1. She is as a lily; he himself is the lily, ver. 1. she is as the lily; the beauty of believers consists in their conformity to Jesus Christ, and resembling him: They are his love, and so they are as lilies, for those are made like Christ, in whose hearts his love is shed abroad. 2. As a lily among thorns; as a lily compared with thorns; the church of Christ doth as far excel all other societies, as a bed of roses doth a bush of thorns; as a lily compassed with thorns. The wicked, the daughters of this world, such as have no love to Christ, are as thorns, worthless and useless, good for nothing but to stop a gap; nay, they are noxious and hurtful, they came in with sin,

and are a fruit of the curse; they choke good seed, and hinder good fruit, and their end is to be burned. God's people are as lilies among them, scratched and torn, shaded and obscured by them: They are dear to Christ, and yet exposed to hardships and troubles in the world; they must expect it, for they are planted among thorns, Ezek. ii. 6. but they are never the less dear to him for that; he doth not overlook or undervalue any of his lilies for their being among thorns: When they are among thorns, they must still be as lilies, must maintain their innocency and purity, and though they are among thorns, must not be turned into thorns, must not render railing for railing, and if they thus preserve their character, they shall be still owned as conformable to Christ. Grace in the soul is a lily among thorns, corruptions are thorns in the flesh, 2 Cor. xii. 7. are as Canaanites to God's Israel, Josh. xxiii. 13. but the lily that is now among thorns, shall shortly be transplanted out of this wilderness into that paradise, where there is no pricking brier, or grieving thorn, Ezek. xxviii. 24.

3. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. 4. He brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me was love. 5. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love. 6. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. 7. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love till he please.

Here, 1. The spouse commends her beloved, and prefers him before all others. As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, which, perhaps, doth not grow so high, nor spread so wide, as some other trees, yet is useful and serviceable to man, yielding pleasant and profitable fruit, while the other trees are of little use, no, not the cedars themselves, till they are cut down, so is my beloved among the sons, so far doth he excel them all, all the sons of God, the angels; that honour was put upon him, which was never designed for them, Heb. i. 4. all the sons of men; he is fairer than them all, than the choicest of them, Psalm xlv. 2. Name what creature you will, and you will find Christ has the preeminence above them all: The world is a barren tree to a soul, Christ is a fruitful one.

2. She remembers the abundant comfort she has had in communion with him; she sat down by him with great delight, as shepherds sometimes repose themselves, sometimes converse with one another under a tree.

A double advantage she found in sitting down so near the Lord Jesus. 1. A refreshing shade; I sat down under his shadow, to be sheltered by him from the scorching heat of the sun, to be cooled, and so to take some rest: Christ is to believers as the shadow of a great tree, nay, of a great rock in a weary land, Isa. xxxii. 2. xxv. 4. When a poor soul is parched with convictions of sin, and the terrors of the law, as David, Psalm xxxii. 4. when fatigued with the troubles of this world, as Elijah, when he sat down under the juniper-tree, 1 Kings xix. 4. they find that in Christ, in his name, his graces, his comforts, and his undertaking for poor sinners, which revives them, and keeps them from fainting; they that are weary and heavy laden, in Christ may find rest. It is not enough to pass by this shadow, but we must sit down under it; here will I dwell, for I have desired it; and we shall find it not like Jonah's gourd, that soon withered, and left him in a heat, both inward and outward, but like the tree of life, the leaves whereof were not only for shelter, but for the healing of the nations. We must sit down under this shadow with delight, must put an entire confidence in the protection of it, as Judges ix. 15. and take an entire complacency in the refreshment of it. But that is not all, 2. Here is pleasing, nourishing food; this tree drops its fruits to those that sit down under its shadow, and they are welcome to them, and will find them sweet unto their taste, whatever they are to others; believers have tasted that the Lord Jesus is gracious, 1 Pet. ii. 3. his fruits are all the precious privileges of the new covenant, purchased by his blood, and communicated by his Spirit; promises are sweet to a believer, yea, and precepts too; I delight in the law of God, after the inward man. Pardons are sweet, and peace of conscience sweet, assurances of God's love, joys of the holy Ghost, the hopes of eternal life, and the present earnest and foretastes of it are sweet, all sweet to those that have their spiritual senses exercised. If our mouths be put out of taste to the pleasures of sin, divine consolations will be sweet to our taste, sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb.

3. She owns her self obliged to Jesus Christ for all the benefit and comfort she had had in communion with him, ver. 4. I sat down under the apple-tree, glad to be there, but he admitted me, nay, he pressed me, to a more intimate communion with him; Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without? He brought me to the house of wine, the place where he used to entertain his special friends; from lower to higher measures and degrees of comfort, from

from the fruit of the *apple-tree* to the more generous fruit of the vine. *To him that values the divine joys he hath, more shall be given.* One of the rabbins, by the *banqueting-house*, understands the *tabernacle of the congregation*, where the interpretation of the law was given; sure then we may apply it to christian assemblies, where the gospel is preached; and gospel ordinances are administered, particularly the Lord's supper; that *banquet of wine*, especially to the inside of those ordinances, communion with God in them. Observe, 1. How she was introduced; *he brought me*, wrought in me an inclination to draw nigh to God; helped me over my discouragements, took me by the hand, guided and led me, and gave me an *access* with boldness to God as a *Father*, Eph. ii. 18. We had never come into the *banqueting-house*; had never been acquainted with spiritual pleasures; if Christ had not brought us, by opening for us a new and living way; and opening in us a new and living fountain. 2. How she was entertained; *his banner over me was love*: *He brought me* in with a banner displayed over my head, not as one he triumphed over, but as one he triumphed in, and whom he always caused to triumph with him; and in him; 2 Cor. ii. 14. The gospel is compared to a *banner*, or *ensign*, Isa. xi. 12. and that which is represented in this *banner*; written in it in letters of gold, letters of blood, is *love*; *love*; and this is the entertainment in the *banqueting-house*. Christ is the *captain of our salvation*, and he lifts all his soldiers under the *banner of love*; in that they centre, to that they must continually have an eye; and be animated by it; *the love of Christ* must *constrain* them to fight manfully. When a city was taken, the conqueror set up his standard in it; he has conquered me with his love, overcome me with kindness, and that is the *banner over me*. This she speaks of as what she had formerly had experience of, and she remembers it with delight: Eaten bread must not be forgotten, but remembered with thankfulness to that God who has fed us with manna in this wilderness.

4. She professeth her strong affection; and most passionate love to Jesus Christ; ver. 5. *I am sick of love*, overcome, overpowered by it. David explains this, when he saith; *Psal. cxix. 20. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments*, and, ver. 81. *My soul fainteth for thy salvation*; languishing with care to make it sure; and fear of coming short of it. The spouse was now absent; perhaps, from her beloved; waiting for his return, and cannot bear the grief of distance and delay. O how much better is it with the soul when it is *sick of love* to Christ, than when it is surfeited with the love of this world! She cries out for cordials, *O stay me with flagons*, or ointments, or flowers; any thing that is reviving, *comfort me with apples*, with the fruits of that *apple-tree*, Christ, ver. 3. with the merit and mediation of Christ, and the sense of his love to my soul. Note; They that are *sick of love* to Christ, shall not want spiritual supports, while they are yet waiting for spiritual comforts.

5. She experienceth the power and tenderness of divine grace, relieving her in her present faintings, ver. 6. Though he seemed to have withdrawn; yet he was even then a very present help, 1. To sustain the love-sick soul; and to keep it from fainting away; *his left hand is under my head*, to bear it up; nay, as a pillow to lay it easy. David experienced God's hand upholding him then when *his soul was following hard after God*, *Psal. lxxiii. 8*; and Job, in a state of desertion, yet found that God *put strength* into him; *Job xxiii. 6. All his saints are in his hand*, which tenderly holds their aching heads. 2. To encourage the love-sick soul to continue waiting till he returns; for in the mean time *his right hand doth embrace me*, and thereby gives me an unquestionable assurance of his love. Believers owe all their strength and comfort to the supporting left hand, and embracing right hand of the Lord Jesus.

6. Finding her beloved thus nigh unto her, she is in great care that her communion with him be not interrupted, ver. 7. *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem*: Jerusalem; the mother of us all, chargeth all her daughters, the church chargeth all her members, the believing soul chargeth all its powers and faculties, the spouse chargeth her self, and all about her; not to *stir up*, or *awake my love until he please*, now he is asleep in her arms, as she was born up in his, ver. 6. She gives them this charge by the *roes*, and the *hinds of the field*, i. e. by every thing that is amiable in their eyes, and dear to them, as the *loving hind*, and the *pleasant roe*; my love is to me dearer than those can be to you, and will be disturbed like them with a very little noise. Note, 1. Those that experience the sweetness of communion with Christ, and the sensible manifestations of his love, cannot but desire the continuance of these blessed views, those blessed visits: Peter would make tabernacles upon the holy mount, *Matt. xvii. 4*. 2. Yet Christ will, when he pleaseth, withdraw those extraordinary communications of himself, for he is a free agent, and the Spirit, as the *wind*, *blows*, where, and when it *listeth*, and in his pleasure it becomes us to acquiesce. But, 3. Our care must be, that we do nothing to provoke him to withdraw, and to hide his face; that we carefully watch over our own hearts, and suppress every thought that may grieve his good Spirit. Let those that have comfort be afraid of sinning it away.

8. 5 The voice of my beloved! behold; he cometh leaping upon the mountains; skipping upon the hills. 9. My beloved is like a roe; or a young hart: behold; he standeth behind our wall; he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattices. 10. My beloved spake and said unto me; Rise up, my love; my fair one, and come away. 11. For lo; the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. 12. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come; and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. 13. The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs; and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell. Arise; my love; my fair one; and come away.

The church is here pleasing herself exceedingly with the thoughts of her further communion with Christ after she is recovered from her fainting fit.

1. She rejoiceth in his approach, ver. 8. (1.) She hears him speak, it is *the voice of my beloved*, calling to me to tell me he is coming; like one of his own sheep she *knows his voice* before she sees him, and can easily distinguish it from *the voice of a stranger*, *John x. 4, 5*. and, like a faithful friend of the Bridegroom, she *rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice*, *John iii. 29*. With what an air of triumph and exultation doth she cry out, *It is the voice of my beloved*, it can be the voice of no other; for none but he can speak to the heart and make that burn. (2.) She seeth him come; sees the goings of *our God*, *our King*, *Psal. lxxviii. 24. Behold, he comes*. This may very well be applied to the prospect which the Old Testament saints had of Christ's coming in the flesh: *Abraham saw his day at a distance and was glad*. The nearer the time came, the clearer discoveries were made of it; and they that waited for the consolation of Israel, with an eye of faith, saw him come, and triumphed in the sight: *Behold, he comes*, for they had heard him say; *Psal. xl. 7. Lo, I come*, to which their faith here affixeth its seal; *behold, he comes* as he has promised. 1. He comes cheerfully and with great alacrity: he comes leaping and skipping *like a roe*, and like a *young hart*; ver. 9. as one pleased with his own undertaking; and that had his heart upon it; and his delights with the sons of men. When he came to be baptized with the baptism of blood; how was he *straitened till it was accomplished*? *Luke xii. 50*. 2. He comes slighting and surmounting all the difficulties that lay in his way; he comes *leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills*, so some read it; making nothing of the discouragements he was to break through; the curse of the law, the death of the cross, must be undergone, all the powers of darkness must be grappled with, but before the resolutions of his love these great mountains become plains. Whatever opposition is given at any time to the deliverances of God's church Christ will break through it, will get over it. (3.) He comes speedily, *like a roe*, or a *young hart*; they thought the time long, every day a year; but really he hastened, as now, so then *surely he comes quickly*; *he that shall come will come, and will not tarry*. When he comes for the deliverance of his people he *flies upon a cloud*, and never stays beyond his time, which is the best time. We may apply it to particular believers, who find that even when Christ has withdrawn sensible comforts, and seems to forsake, yet it is but for a small moment; and he will soon return with everlasting loving-kindnesses.

2. She pleaseth herself with the glimpses she has of him, and the glances she has of his favour: He *stands behind our wall*, I know he is there, for sometimes *he looks forth at the window*, or *looks in at it*, and flourisheth himself through the lattices. Such was the state of the Old Testament church while it was in expectation of the coming of the Messiah; the ceremonial law is called a *wall of partition*, *Ephes. ii. 14. a veil*, 2 Cor. iii. 13; but Christ stood behind that wall, they had him near them, they had him with them, though they could not see him clearly; he that was the substance was not far off from the shadows, *Col. ii. 17*. They saw him looking through the windows of the ceremonial institutions, and blossoming through those lattices; in their sacrifices and purifications Christ discovered himself to them, and gave them intimations and earnestness of his grace, both to engage and to encourage their longings for his coming. Such is our present state in comparison with what it will be at Christ's second coming; we now *see him through a glass darkly*, the body is a wall between us and him, through the windows of which we now and then get a sight of him, but not *face to face*, as we hope to see him shortly. In the sacraments Christ is near us, but it is *behind the wall* of external signs, through *those lattices* he manifests himself to us; but we shall shortly *see him as he is*. Some understand this of the state of a believer when he is under a cloud; Christ is out of sight, and yet not far off. See *Job xxxv. 14*. and compare *Job xxiii. 8, 9, 10*. She calls the wall that interposed between her and her beloved, *our wall*, because it is sin, and nothing else, that separates between us and God, and that is a wall of our own erecting, *Isa. lix. 1*. behind that he stands, as *waiting to be gracious*, and ready to be reconciled upon our repentance. Then he *looks in at the window*, observes

observes the frame of our hearts and the working of our souls; he looks forth at the window, and shews himself in giving them some comfort, that they may continue hoping for his return.

3. She repeats the gracious invitation he had given her to come a walking with him, *ver. 10, — 13*. She remembers what her beloved said to her, for it had made a very pleasing and powerful impression upon her, and the word that quickens us we shall never forget. She relates it for the encouragement of others, telling them what he had said to her soul, and *done for her soul*, *Psal. lxxvi. 16*.

(1.) He called her his love and his fair one; whatever she is to others, to him she is acceptable, and in his eyes she is amiable. Those that take Christ for their beloved, he will own them as his; never was any love lost that was bestowed upon Christ. Christ, by expressing his love to believers, invites and encourages them to follow him.

(2.) He called her to *rise and come away*, *ver. 10*. And again, *ver. 13*. the repetition notes backwardness in her; we have need to be often called to come away with Jesus Christ, *precept must be upon precept, and line upon line*. But it notes earnestness in him; so much is his heart set upon the welfare of precious souls, that he importunes them most pressing to that which is for their own good.

(3.) He gave for a reason the return of the spring, and the pleasantness of the weather; which is elegantly described in a great variety of expressions.

1. *The winter is past*, the dark, and cold, and barren winter; long winters and hard ones pass away at last, they do not endure always. And the spring would not be so pleasant as it is, if it did not succeed the winter, which is a foil to its beauty, *Ecc. vii. 14*. The face neither of the heavens, nor of the earth, is always the same, but subject to continual vicissitudes, diurnal and annual. *The winter is past*, but not past away for ever, it will come again, and we must provide for it in summer, *Prov. vi. 6, 8*. We must weep in winter and rejoice in summer, as though we wept and rejoiced not, for both are passing.

2. *The rain is over and gone*, the winter rain, the cold stormy rain, it is over now, and *the dew is as the dew of herbs*. Even the rain that drowned the world was over and gone at last, *Gen. viii. 1, 2, 3*. and God promised to drown the world no more, which was a type and figure of the covenant of grace, *Isaiah liv. 9*.

3. *The flowers appear on the earth*; all winter they are dead and buried in their roots, and there is no sign of them, but in the spring they revive, and shew themselves in a wonderful variety and verdure, and like the dew that produceth them, *tarry not for man*, *Mic. v. 7*. They appear, but they will soon disappear again, and man is herein like *the flower of the field*, *Job xiv. 2*.

4. *The time of the singing of birds is come*: The little birds that all the winter lie hid in their retirements, and scarce live, when the spring returns forget all the calamities of the winter, and to the best of their capacity chant forth the praises of their Creator. And he that understands the birds that cry for want, *Psal. cxlvii. 9*. no doubt takes notice of those that *sing for joy*, *Psal. civ. 12*. The singing of birds may shame our silence in God's praises, who are better fed, *Matth. vi. 26*. and better taught, *Job xxxv. 11*. and are of *more value than many sparrows*. They live without inordinate care, *Matth. vi. 26*. and therefore they sing while we murmur,

5. *The voice of the turtle is heard in our land*, which is one of the season birds mentioned *Jer. viii. 7*. that observe the time of their coming, and the time of their singing, and so shame us who *know not the judgment of the Lord*, understand not the times, nor do that which is *beautiful in its season*, do not sing in singing time.

6. *The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs*, by which we know that summer is nigh, *Matth. xxiv. 32*. when the green figs will be ripe figs and fit for use; and the *vines with the tender grapes give a good smell*; the earth produceth not only flowers, *ver. 12*. but fruits; and the smell of the fruits, which are profitable, is to be preferred far before that of the flowers, which are only for shew and pleasure. Serpents, they say, are driven away by the smell of vines; and who is the old serpent, and who the true vine, we know very well.

Now this description of the returning spring, as a reason for coming away with Christ, is applicable,

1. To the introducing the gospel in the room of the Old Testament dispensation, during which it had been winter time with the church. Christ's gospel warms that which was cold, makes that fruitful which before was dead and barren; when it comes to any place it put a beauty and glory upon that place, *2 Cor. iii. 7, 8*. and ministers occasion for joy. Spring-time is pleasant time, and so is gospel-time. *Aspice venturo latentur ut omnia sæclo*, said Virgil, from the Sybils, perhaps with more reference to the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom at that time than he himself thought of. See *Psal. xcvi. 11*. *Arise then*, and improve this spring-time; *come away from the world and the flesh, come into fellowship with Christ*, *1 Cor. i. 9*.

2. To the delivering of the church from the power of persecuting enemies, and the restoring of liberty and peace to it, after a severe winter of suffering and restraint. When the storms of trouble are over and gone, when the *voice of the turtle*, the joyful sound of the gospel of Christ is again heard, and ordinances enjoyed with freedom, then *arise and come away* to improve the happy juncture. Walk in the light of the Lord; sing in the ways of the Lord: when the churches had rest, then were they edified, *Acts ix. 31*.

3. To the conversion of sinners, from a state of nature to a state of grace; that blessed change is like the return of the spring, a universal change, and a very comfortable one; it is a new creation, it is being born again. The soul that was hard, and cold, and frozen, and unprofitable, like the earth in winter, becomes fruitful, like the earth in spring; and by degrees, like it, brings its fruits to perfection. This blessed change is owing purely to the approaches and influences of the Sun of Righteousness, who calls to us from heaven to *arise and come away*; come, gather in summer.

4. To the consolation of the saints, after a state of inward dejection and despondency. A child of God under doubts and fears, is like the earth in winter, its nights long, its days dark, good affections chilled, nothing done, nothing got, the hand sealed up. But comfort will return, the birds shall sing again, and the flowers appear, arise therefore, poor drooping soul, and *come away* with thy beloved. *Arise, and shake thyself from the dust*, *Isai. lii. 2*. *Arise, shine, for thy light is come*, *Isai. lx. 1*. *walk in that light*, *Isai. ii. 5*.

5. To the resurrection of the body at the last day, and the glory to be revealed. The bones that lay in the grave, as the roots of plants in the ground during the winter, shall then *flourish as an herb*, *Isai. lxvi. 14, — 26. 19*. That will be an eternal farewell to winter, and a joyful entrance upon an everlasting spring.

14. *O my dove that art in the clefts of the rock*, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. 15. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. 16. *O My beloved is mine, and I am his*: he feedeth among the lilies. 18. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away: turn my beloved, and be thou like a roe, or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether.

Here is, 1. The encouraging invitation which Christ gives to the church, and to every believing soul to come into communion with him, *ver. 14*. (1.) His love is now his *dove*; David had called the church God's *turtle-dove*, *Psal. lxxiv. 19*. and so she is here called; a dove for beauty, her *wings covered with silver*, *Psal. lxxviii. 13*. for innocency and inoffensiveness; a gracious spirit is a dove-like spirit, galleys and harmless, loving quietness and cleanliness, and faithful to Christ, as the turtle to her mate. The Spirit descended *like a dove* on Christ, and so he doth on all christians, making them of a *meek and quiet spirit*. She is Christ's *dove*; for he owns her, and delights in her, she can find no rest but in him and his ark, and therefore to him, as her Noah, she returns. (2.) This dove is *in the clefts of the rock, and in the secret places of the stairs*. This speaks either, 1. Her praise; Christ is the rock to whom she flies for shelter, and in whom alone she can think herself safe, and find herself easy, as a dove in the hole of the rock, when struck at by the birds of prey, *Jer. xlviii. 28*. Moses was hid in a cleft of the rock, that he might behold something of God's glory, which otherwise he could not have born the brightness of. She retires into the *secret places of the stairs*, where she may be alone, undisturbed, and may the better commune with her own heart. Good christians will find time to be private. Christ often withdrew to a mountain *himself alone to pray*. Or, 2. Her blame, she crept into the *clefts of the rocks*, and the *secret places* for fear and shame; any where to hide her head, being heartless and discouraged, and shunning even the sight of her beloved, being conscious to herself of her own unfitness and unworthiness to come into his presence and speak to him, she drew back, and was *like a silly dove without heart*, *Hos. vii. 11*. (3.) Christ graciously calls her out of her retirements; Come, *let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice*: she was *mourning like a dove*, *Isai. xxxviii. 14*. bemoaning herself like the *doves of the vallies*, where they are near the clefts of the impending rocks, *mourning for her iniquities*, *Ezek. vii. 16*. and refusing to be comforted. But Christ calls her to *lift up her face without spot*, being purged from an evil conscience, *Job xi. 15, — 22, 26*. to *come boldly to the throne of grace*, having a great *High-priest* there, *Heb. iv. 16*. to tell what her petition is, and what her request, let me *hear thy voice*, hear what thou hast to say; *what would ye that I should do unto you?* Speak freely, speak up, and fear not a slight or repulse. (4.) For her encouragement, he tells her the good thoughts he had of her, what-

whatever the thought of herself; *sweet is thy voice*, thy praying voice, though thou canst but *chatter like a crane, or a swallow*, Isa. xxxviii. 14. it is musick in God's ears; he hath assured us, that *the prayer of the upright is his delight*; he smelled a sweet favour from Noah's sacrifice, and the *spiritual sacrifices* are no less acceptable, 1 Pet. ii. 5. This doth not so much commend our services, as God's gracious condescension in making the best of them, and the efficacy of the *much incense* which is offered with the prayers of saints, Rev. viii. 3. That countenance of thine, which thou art ashamed of, is comely; though now mournful, much more will it be so when it becomes chearful. Then the voice of prayer is sweet and acceptable to God, when the countenance, i. e. the conversation in which we shew ourselves before men is holy, and so comely and agreeable to our profession; those that are sanctified have the best comeliness.

2. The charge which Christ gives to his servants, to oppose and suppress that which is a terror to his church, and drives her, like a poor frightened dove into the clefts of the rock, and which is an obstruction and prejudice to the interests of his kingdom in the world, and in the heart, ver. 15. *Take us the foxes* (take them for us, for it is good service, both to Christ and the church) *the little foxes* that creep in insensibly, for though they are little they do great mischief, they spoil the vines, which they must by no means be suffered to do at any time; especially now when our vines have *tender grapes* that must be preserved, or the vintage will fail. Believers are as vines, weak, but useful plants; their fruits are as *tender grapes* at first, which must have time to come to maturity. This charge to *take the foxes* is, (1.) A charge to particular believers to mortify their own corruptions, their sinful appetites and passions, which are as *foxes, little foxes*, that destroy their graces and comforts, quash good motions, crush good beginnings, and prevent their coming to perfection. Seize the *little foxes*, the first risings of sin, the little ones of Babylon, Psal. cxxxvii. 9. those sins that seem little, for they often prove very dangerous. Whatever we find a hindrance to us in that which is good, we must put it away. (2.) A charge to all in their places to oppose and prevent the spreading of all such opinions and practices as tend to corrupt mens judgments, debauch their consciences, perplex their minds, and discourage their inclinations to virtue and piety; persecutors are foxes, Luke xiii. 32. false prophets are foxes, Ezek. xiii. 4. Those that sow the tares of heresy or schism, and like Diotrephes, trouble the peace of the church, and obstruct the progress of the gospel; they are the *foxes, the little foxes*, which must not be knocked on the head, (*Christ came not to destroy mens lives*) but taken, that they may be tamed, or else restrained from doing mischief.

3. The believing profession which the church makes of her relation to Christ, and the satisfaction she takes in her interest in him, and communion with him, ver. 16. He had called her to *rise and come away* with him, to let him see her face and hear her voice, now this is her answer to that call, in which, though at present in the dark and at a distance, (1.) She comforts herself with the thoughts of the mutual interest and relation that was between her and her beloved: *My beloved to me*, and *I to him*; so the original reads it very emphatically; the conciseness of the language speaks the largeness of her affection; what he is to me; and I to him, may better be conceived than expressed. Note, 1. It is the unspeakable privilege of all true believers that Christ is theirs; *my beloved is mine*, that notes not only propriety; I have a title to him, but possession and tenure. I receive from his fulness; believers are partakers of Christ, they have not only an interest in him, but the enjoyment of him; are taken not only into covenant, but into communion with him. All the benefits of his glorious undertaking, as Mediator, are made over to them. He is that to them which the world neither is nor can be, all that which they need and desire, and which will make a compleat happiness for them. All he is is theirs; and all he has, all he has done, and all he is doing; all he has promised in the gospel, all he hath prepared in heaven, all is yours. 2. It is the undoubted character of all true believers, that they are Christ's, and then, and then only he is theirs: they have given their own selves to him, 2 Cor. viii. 5. they receive his doctrine and obey his law, they bear his image and espouse his interest; they belong to Christ. If we be his, his wholly, his only, his for ever, we may take the comfort of his being ours. (2.) She comforts herself with the thoughts of the communications of his grace to his people: *He feedeth among the lilies*. When she wants the tokens of his favour to her in particular, she rejoiceth in the assurance of his presence with all believers in general; who are as lilies in his eye, he *feeds* among them, i. e. he takes as much pleasure in them and their assemblies, as a man doth at his table, or his garden, for he *walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks*, he delights to converse with them and to do them good.

4. The churches hope and expectation of Christ's coming, and her prayer grounded thereupon.

ver. 17. She doubts not but that the *day will break*, and the *shadows* will *flee away*. The gospel day will dawn, and the shadows of the ceremonial law will flee away; this was the comfort of the

Old Testament church, that after the long night of that dark dispensation, the *day-spring from on high* would, at length, *visit them*, to *give light to them that sit in darkness*; when the sun riseth, the shades of the night vanish, so do the shadows of the day when the substance comes. The day of comfort will come after a night of desertion. Or, it may refer to the second coming of Christ, and the eternal happiness of the saints; the shadows of our present state will flee away, our darkness and doubts, our griefs and all our grievances, and a glorious day shall dawn, a morning when the *upright shall have dominion*; a day that shall have no night after it.

2. She begs the presence of her beloved in the mean time, to support and comfort her; *turn, my beloved, turn to me, come and visit me, come and relieve me, be with me always to the end of the age*. In the day of my extremity make haste to help me, *make no long tarrying*. Come over even the *mountains of division*, interposing time and days, with some gracious anticipations of that light and love.

3. She begs that he would not only turn to her for the present, but hasten his coming to fetch her to himself: *Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly*. Though there be mountains in the way, thou canst, *like a roe, or a young hart*, step over them with ease. *O shew thyself to me, or take me up to thee*.

C H A P. III.

In this chapter, 1. The church gives an account of a sore trial wherewith she was exercised through the withdrawing of her beloved from her, the pains she was at before she recovered the comfortable sense of his favour again, and the resolution she took when she did recover it, not to lose it again, as she had done through her own carelessness, ver. 1, — 5. 2. The daughters of Jerusalem admire the excellencies of the church, ver. 6. 3. The church admires Jesus Christ under the person of Solomon, his bed, and the life-guards about it, ver. 7, 8. His chariot, ver. 9, 10. And calls upon the daughters of Zion, who were admiring her, to admire him rather, especially as he appeared on his coronation day, and the day of his nuptials, ver. 11.

1. **B**Y night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. 2. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. 3. The watchmen that go about the city, found me: *to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* 4. *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mothers house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.* 5. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field; that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

God useth not to say to the seed of Jacob, *Seek ye me in vain*, and yet here we have the spouse for a great while seeking her beloved in vain, but finding him at last to her unspeakable satisfaction. It was hard to the Old Testament church to find Christ in the ceremonial law, and the types and figures which then were *of good things to come*: long was the consolation of Israel looked for before it came; the watchmen of that church gave little assistance to those who enquired after him, but at length Simeon had him in his arms *whom his soul loved*. It is applicable to the case of particular believers, who often walk in darkness a great while; but *at even-time it shall be light*, and they that seek Christ to the end shall find him at length. Observe;

1. How the spouse sought him in vain *upon her bed*, ver. 1. when she was up and looking about her, grace in act and exercise, though her beloved was withdrawn, yet she could not see him at a distance, chap. ii. 8. but now it was otherwise. She still continued her affection to him, still it was *he whom her soul loved*, that bond of the covenant continued firm; *though he slay me, I will trust in him*, though he leave me, I will love him. When I have him not in my arms, I have him in my heart. But she wanted the communion she used to have with him; as David, when he *thirsted for God, for the living God*. She sought him, but, (1.) It was *by night on her bed*, it was late and lazy seeking. Her understanding was clouded, it was by night, in the dark, her affections were chilled, it was on her bed half asleep. The wise virgins slumbered in the absence of the Bridegroom. It was a dark time with the believer, she saw not her signs, and yet she sought them. They whose souls love Jesus Christ will continue to seek him; even in silence and solitude: their reins instruct them to do so *even in the night season*. (2.) She missed of finding him: some-

sometimes he is *found of them that seek him not*, Isa. lxxv. 1. but here he is not found of one that sought him; either for the punishment of her corruptions, her slothfulness and security, (we miss of comfort because we do not seek it aright) or for the exercise of her graces, her faith and patience, to try whether she will continue seeking; the woman of Canaan sought Christ and found him not at first, that she might find him at length so much more to her honour and comfort.

2. How she sought him in vain abroad, *ver. 2.* She had made trial of secret worship, and had gone through the duties of the closet, had remembered him on her bed, and meditated on him in the *night-watches*, Psal. lxxiii. 6. but she did not meet with comfort, *my fore ran in the night*, and then *I remembered God, and was troubled*, Psal. lxxvii. 2. 3. and yet she is not driven off by the disappointment from the use of further means: she resolves, *I will rise now*, I will not lie here if I cannot find my beloved here, nor be content if he be withdrawn. *I will rise now*, without delay, and seek him presently, lest he withdraw further from me: those that would seek Christ so as to find him, must lose no time. *I will rise* out of a warm bed, and go out in a cold dark night in quest of my beloved. Those that seek Christ must not stick or startle at difficulties: *I will rise and go about the city*, the holy city, in the streets, and the broad ways, for she knew he was not to be found in any blind by-ways; we must seek in the city, in Jerusalem, which was a type of the gospel church. The likeliest place to find Christ is in the temple, *Luke ii. 46.* in the streets of the gospel church, in holy ordinances, where the children of Zion pass and repass at all hours. She had a good purpose when she said, *I will arise now*, but the good performance was all in all; she arose and sought him. Those that are in pursuit of Christ, the knowledge of him, and communion with him, must turn every stone, seek every where; and yet *she found him not*; she was still unsatisfied, uneasy, as Job, when he looked on all sides, but could not perceive any tokens of the divine favour, *Job xxiv. 8, 9.* and the psalmist often, when he complained that God hid his face from him, *Psal. lxxxviii. 14.* We may be in the way of our duty, and yet miss of comfort, for *the wind bloweth where it listeth*. How heavy is the accent on this repeated complaint, *I sought him, but I found him not*; like that of Mary Magdalen, *they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him*, *John xx. 13.*

3. How she enquired of the watchmen concerning him, *ver. 3.* In the night the watchmen *go about the city*, for the preservation of its peace and safety, to guide and assist the honest and quiet, as well as to be a check upon those that are disorderly; these met her in her walks, and she asked them if they could give her any tidings of her beloved. In the streets and broad ways of Jerusalem she might meet with enough to divert her from her pursuit, and to entertain her, though she could not meet her beloved; but the regards none in comparison with him. Gracious souls press through crowds of other delights and contentments in pursuit of Christ, whom they prefer before their chief joy. Mary Magdalen sees angels in the sepulchre, but that will not do, unless she see Jesus. *Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* Note, We must evidence the sincerity of our love to Christ by our solicitous enquiries after him. *The children of the bride-chamber will mourn, when the bridegroom is taken away*, *Matth. ix. 15.* especially for the sin which provoked him to withdraw; and if we do so, we will be in care to recover the sense of his favour, and diligent and constant in the use of proper means in order thereunto; we must search the scriptures, be much in prayer, keep close to ordinances, and all with this upon our heart, *Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?* Those only who have seen Christ themselves, are likely to direct others to a sight of him. When the Greeks came to worship at the feast, they applied themselves to Philip, with such an address as this of the spouse to the watchmen, *Sir, We would see Jesus*, *John xii. 21.*

4. How she found him at last, *ver. 4.* She passed from the watchmen as soon as she perceived they could give her no tidings of her beloved; she would not stay with them because he was not among them, but went on seeking; for (as Ainsworth observes) neither the society of brethren, or church, or ministers, can comfort the afflicted conscience, unless Christ himself be apprehended by faith. But presently after she parted from the watchmen she found him whom she sought, and then called him, *him whom my soul loveth*, with as much delight as before with desire. Note, Those that continue seeking Christ shall find him at last, and when, perhaps, they were almost ready to despair of finding him. See *Psal. xlii. 7, 8.* *lxxvii. 9, 10.* *Isa. liv. 7, 8.* Disappointments must not drive us away from gracious pursuits, hold out faith and patience, *the vision is for an appointed time*, and though the watchman can give us no account of it, *at the end it shall itself speak and not lie*; and the comfort that comes in after long waiting, in the use of means, will be so much the sweeter at last.

5. How close she kept to him when she had found him; she is now as much in fear of losing him, as before she was in care to find him. *I held him*, held him fast, as the women when they met with Christ after his resurrection, *held him by the feet and worshipped him*, *Matth. xxviii. 9.* *I would not let him go.* Not only, I would never do any thing to provoke him to depart;

but I would by faith and prayer prevail with him to stay, and, by the exercise of grace, preserve inward peace. Those that know how hard comfort is come by, and how dear it is bought, will be afraid of forfeiting it, and playing it away, and will think nothing too much to do to keep it safe. *Non minor est virtus quam quærere parta tueri.* They that have laid hold on wisdom, must retain her, *Prov. iii. 18.* Those that hold Christ fast in the arms of faith and love shall *not let him go*, he will abide with them.

6. How desirous she was to bring others acquainted with him: *I brought him to my mother's house*, that all my relations, all that are dear to me, might have the benefit of communion with him. When Zaccheus found Christ; or rather was found of him, *salvation came to his house*, *Luke xix. 9.* Wherever we find Christ we must take him home with us to our houses; especially to our hearts. The church is our mother, and we should be concerned for her interests, that she may have Christ present with her, and be earnest in prayer for his presence with his people and ministers always. They that enjoy the tokens of Christ's favour to their own souls, should desire that the church, and all religious assemblies in their publick capacity, might likewise enjoy the tokens of his favour.

7. What care she was in that no disturbance might be given him, *ver. 5.* she repeats the charge she had before given, *chap. ii. 7.* to the *daughters of Jerusalem*, not to stir up, or awake her love. When she had brought him into her mother's house; among her sisters, she gives them a strict charge to keep all quiet; and in good order; to be very observant of him, careful to please him, and afraid of offending him: The charge given to the church in the wilderness concerning the angel of the covenant that was among them explains this, *Exod. xxiii. 21.* *Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not*: See that none of you stir out of your places, lest you disturb him, but *with quietness work and mind your own business*; make no noise, let all clamour and bitterness be put far from you, for that grieves the holy Spirit of God, *Eph. iv. 30, 31.* Some make this here to be Christ's charge to the *daughters of Jerusalem*, not to disturb or disquiet his church, nor trouble the minds of the disciples; for Christ is very tender of the peace of his church, and all the members of it, even the little ones, and those that trouble them shall bear their judgment, *Gal. v. 10.*

6. ¶ Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh, and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

These are the words of the *daughters of Jerusalem*, to whom the charge was given, *ver. 5.* They had looked shily upon the bride, because she was black, *chap. i. 6.* but now they admire her, and speak of her with great respect; *Who is this?* how beautiful doth she look? who would have expected such a comely and magnificent person to come out of the wilderness? As, when Christ rode in triumph into Jerusalem, they said, *Who is this?* And of the accession of strangers to the church, she herself saith with wonder, *Isa. xlix. 21.* *Who has begotten me these?*

1. This is applicable to the Jewish church, when, after forty years wandering in the wilderness, they came out of it to take a glorious possession of the land of promise; and this may very well be illustrated by what Balaam said of them at that time when they ascended out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, and he stood admiring them, *from the top of the rocks I see him: How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* *Numb. xxiii. 9, xxiv. 5.*

2. It is applicable to any publick deliverance of the church of God, as particularly out of Babylon, the Old Testament, and the New Testament Babylon; then the church is like pillars of smoke, ascending upwards in devout affections, and the incense of praise to God, from which, as from Noah's sacrifice, he smells a sweet savour: Then she is amiable in the eyes of her friends, and her enemies too cannot but have a veneration for her, and worship at her feet, knowing that God has loved her, *Rev. iii. 9.* Sometimes the fear of the Jews was upon their neighbours, when they saw that God was with them of a truth, *Esth. viii. 17.*

3. It is applicable to the recovery of a gracious soul out of a state of desertion and despondency. 1. She ascends out of the wilderness, the dry and barren land, where there is no way, where there is no water, where travellers are still in want, and ever at a loss; here a poor soul may long be left to wander, but shall come up at last, under the conduct of the Comforter. 2. She comes up like pillars of smoke, like a cloud of incense ascending from the altar, or the smoke of the burnt-offerings. This intimates a fire of pious and devout affections in the soul, from whence this smoke arises, and the mounting of the soul heaven-wards in this smoke, as *Judges xiii. 20.* the heart lifted up to God in the heavens, as the sparks fly upwards: Christ's return to the soul gives life to its devotion, and its communion with God is most reviving when it ascends out of a wilderness. 3. She is perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, she is replenished with the graces of God's Spirit, which are as sweet spices, or as the holy incense, which being now kindled, by his gracious returns, sends forth a very fragrant smell, her devotions be now more than ordinary lively, she is not only acceptable

acceptable to God, but amiable in the eyes of others also, who are ready to cry out, with admiration, *Who is this?* What a monument of mercy is this? The graces and comforts with which she is perfumed, are called the *powders of the merchant*, for they are far fetched, and dear bought, by our Lord Jesus, that blessed Merchant, who took a long voyage, and was at vast expence, no less than that of his own blood, to purchase them for us: They are not the products of our own soil, nor the growth of our own country; no, they are imported from the heavenly Canaan, the better country.

7. Behold, his bed which is Solomons, threescore valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. 8. They all hold swords, being expert in war: every man hath his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night. 9. King Solomon made himself a chariot of the wood of Lebanon. 10. He made the pillars thereof of silver, the bottom thereof of gold, the covering of it of purple; the midst thereof being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem. 11. Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.

The daughters of Jerusalem stood admiring the spouse, and commending her, but she overlooks their praises, is not puffed up with them, but transfers all the glory to Christ, and directs them to look off her to him, recommends him to their esteem, and sets her self to applaud him. Here he is three times called Solomon, and we have that name but three times besides in all this song, chap. i. 5. viii. 11, 12. It is Christ that is here meant, who is greater than Solomon, and of whom Solomon was an illustrious type, for his wisdom and wealth, and especially his building the temple.

Three things she admires him for:

1. The safety of his bed, ver. 7. Behold, his bed, even Solomon's, very rich and fine, for so the curtains of Solomon were. His bed, which is above Solomon's, so some read it: Christ's bed, though he had not where to lay his head, is better than Solomon's best bed: The church is his bed, for he hath said of it, *This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell*. The hearts of believers are his bed, for he lies all night between their breasts; Eph. iii. 17. Heaven is his bed, the rest into which he entered when he had done his work. Or, it may be meant of that sweet repose and satisfaction which gracious souls enjoy in communion with him; it is called *his bed*, because, though we are admitted to it, and therefore it is called *our bed*, chap. i. 16. yet, it is his peace that is our rest, John xiv. 27. *I will give you rest*, Matt. xi. 28. It is Solomon's bed, whose name signifies peace, because in his days Judah and Israel dwelt safely under their vines and fig-trees.

That which she admires his bed for, is the guard that surrounded it; they that rest in Christ, not only dwell at ease, many do so who yet are in the greatest danger, but they dwell in safety; their holy serenity is under the protection of a holy security; this bed had threescore valiant men about it, as yeomen of the guard, or the band of gentlemen pensioners, they are of the valiant of Israel, and a great many bold and brave men David's reign had produced; the life-guard-men are well armed, they all hold swords, and know how to hold them, they are expert in war, well skilled in all the arts of it; they are posted about the bed, at a convenient distance, they are in a posture of defence, every man with his sword upon his thigh, and his hand upon his sword, ready to draw upon the first alarm, and this, because of fear in the night, because of the danger feared; for the lives of princes, even the wisest and best, as they are more precious, so they are more exposed, and require to be more guarded, than the lives of common persons: Or, because of the fear of it, and the apprehension which the spouse may have of danger, these guards are set for her satisfaction, that she may be quiet from the fear of evil, which believers themselves are subject to, especially in the night, when they are under a cloud as to their spiritual state, or in any outward trouble more than ordinary. Christ himself was under the special protection of his Father in his whole undertaking; in the shadow of his hand has he hid me, Isa. xlix. 2. he had legions of angels at his command. The church is well guarded, more are with her than are against her; lest any hurt this vineyard, God himself keeps it night and day, Isa. xxvii. 2, 3. particularly believers, when they repose themselves in Christ, and with him, though it may be night-time with them, and they may have their fears in the night, yet they are safe, as safe as Solomon himself, in the midst of his guards; the angels have a charge concerning them, ministers are appointed to watch for their souls, and they ought to be valiant men, expert in the spiritual warfare, holding the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and having that girt upon their thigh, always ready to them for the silencing of the fears of God's people in the night. All the attributes of God are engaged for the safety of believers; they are kept as in a strong

hold by his power, 1 Pet. i. 4. are safe in his name, Prov. xviii. 10. his peace protects those in whom it rules, Phil. iv. 7. and the effect of righteousness in them is quietness and assurance, Isa. xxxii. 17. Our danger is from the rulers of the darkness of this world, but we are safe in the armour of light.

2. The splendor of his chariot, ver. 9, 10. As Christ and believers rest in safety under a sufficient guard, so when they appear publicly, as kings in their coaches of state, they appear in great magnificence. This chariot was of Solomon's own contriving and making, the materials very rich, silver and gold, and cedar and purple; he made it for himself, and yet made it for the daughters of Jerusalem, to oblige them. Some by this chariot, or coach, or chaise, (the word is no where else used in scripture) understand the human nature of Christ, in which the divine nature rode as in a chariot; it was a divine workmanship; a body hast thou prepared me; the structure was very fine, but that which was at the bottom of it was love, pure love to the children of men. Others make it to represent the everlasting gospel, in which, as in an open chariot, Christ shews himself, and, as in a chariot of war, rides forth triumphantly, conquering, and to conquer. The pillars, the seven pillars (Prov. ix. 1.) are of silver, for the words of the Lord are as silver tried, Psalm xii. 7. nay, they are better than thousands of gold and silver; it is hung with purple, a princely colour, all the adornings of it are dyed in the precious blood of Christ, and that gives them this colour; but that which compleats the glory of it is love, it is paved with love, it is lined with love, not love of strangers, as Solomon's was in the days of his defection, but love of the daughters of Jerusalem, a holy love. Silver is better than cedar, gold than silver, but love is better than gold, better than all, and it is put last, for nothing can be better than that. The gospel is all love.

Mr. Durham applies it to the covenant of redemption, the way of our salvation, as it is contrived in the eternal counsel of God, and manifested to us in the scripture: This is that work of Christ himself, wherein the glory of his grace and love to sinners doth most eminently appear, and which makes him amiable and admirable in the eyes of believers; in this covenant love is conveyed to them, and they are carried in it to the perfection of love, and, as it were, ride in triumph: It is admirably framed and contrived, both for the glory of Christ, and for the comfort of believers; it is well ordered in all things, and sure, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. it has pillars that cannot be shaken, it is made of the wood of Lebanon, which can never rot; the basis of it is gold, the most lasting metal; the blood of the covenant, that rich purple, is the cover of this chariot, by which believers are sheltered from the wind and storms of divine wrath; and the troubles of this world; but the midst of it, and that which is all in all in it, is love, that love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and the dimensions of which are unmeasurable.

3. The lustre of his royal person, when he appears in his greatest pomp, ver. 11. Here observe,

(1.) The call that is given to the daughters of Zion, to acquaint themselves with the glories of king Solomon: Go forth, and behold him. The multitude of the spectators adds to the beauty of a splendid cavalcade; Christ, in his gospel, manifests himself, let each of us add to the number of those that give honour to him, by giving themselves the satisfaction of looking upon him. Who should pay respects to Sion's king but Sion's daughters? they have reason to rejoice greatly when he comes; Zech. ix. 9. 1. Behold him then; look with pleasure upon Christ in his glory; look upon him with an eye of faith, with a fixed eye; here is a sight worth seeing; behold, and admire him, behold, and love him; look upon him, and know him again. 2. Go forth, and behold him, go off from the world; as those that see no beauty and excellency in it, in comparison with what is to be seen in the Lord Jesus: Go out of yourselves; and let the sight of his transcendent beauty put you out of conceit with your selves: Go forth, to the place where he is to be seen, to the street through which he passeth, as Zaccheus.

(2.) The direction that is given them what they should take special notice of, as that which they would not see every day, and that was his crown, either the crown of gold, adorned with jewels, which he wore on his coronation-day, Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, though she did not procure that for him; yet, by her seasonable interposal, she helped to secure it to him; when Adonijah was catching at it, or the garland, or crown of flowers and green, tied with ribbons, which his mother made for him, to adorn the solemnity of his nuptials: Perhaps, Solomon's coronation-day was his marriage-day, the day of his espousals, when the garland his mother crowned him with, was added to the crown his people crowned him with. Applying this to Christ, it speaks, 1. The many honours put upon him, and the power and dominion he is entrusted with. Go forth, and see king Jesus, with the crown wherewith his Father crowned him, when he declared him his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased; when he set him as King upon his holy hill of Zion; when he advanced him to his own right hand, and invested him with a sovereign authority, both in heaven and in earth, and put all things under his feet. 2. The dishonour put upon him by his persecutors: Some apply it to the crown of thorns, with which his mother, the Jewish church, crowned him,

on the day of his death, which was *the day of his espousals* to his church, when he *loved it, and gave himself for it*, Eph. v. 25. and it is observable, that when he was *brought forth wearing the crown of thorns*, Pilate said, and said it to the daughters of Zion, *Behold the man*. 3. It seems especially to mean the honour done him by his church, as his mother, and by all true believers, in whose hearts he is formed, and of whom he has said, *These are my mother, and sister, and brother*, Matt. xii. 50. They give him the glory of his undertaking, to him is glory *in the church*, Eph. iii. 21. When believers accept of him as theirs, and join themselves to him in an everlasting covenant, (1.) It is his coronation-day in their souls; before conversion they were crowning themselves, but then they begin to crown Christ, and continue to do so from that day forward; they appoint him their head; they bring *every thought into obedience to him*; they set up his throne in their hearts, and cast all their crowns at his feet. (2.) It is *the day of his espousals*, in which he betroths them to him for ever, in loving-kindness and in mercies, joins them to himself in faith and love, and gives himself to them in the promises, and all he hath, to be theirs: *Thou shalt not be for another, so will I also be for thee*, Hos. iii. 3. and to him they are presented as *chaste virgins*. (3.) It is *the day of the gladness of his heart*; he is pleased with the honour that his people do him, pleased with the progress of his interest among them: *Doth Satan fall before them? In that hour Jesus rejoiceth in spirit*, Luke x. 18, 21. There is joy in heaven over repenting sinners; the family is glad when the prodigal son returns. *Go forth, and behold* Christ's grace towards sinners, as his *crown*, his brightest glory.

C H A P. IV.

In this chapter, 1. Jesus Christ having espoused his church to himself, (chap. iii. 11.) highly commends her beauty in the several instances of it, concluding her fair, all fair, ver. 1,—5. and again, ver. 7. 2. He retires himself, and invites her with him, from the mountains of terror, to those of delight, ver. 6, 8. 3. He professeth his love to her, and his delight in her affection to him, ver. 9,—14. 4. She ascribes all she had that was valuable in her to him, and depends upon the continued influence of his grace, to make her more and more acceptable to him, ver. 15, 16.

1. **B**Ehold, thou art fair, my love, behold, thou art fair, thou hast doves eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats, that appear from mount Gilead. 2. Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing: whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them. 3. Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of pomegranate within thy locks. 4. Thy neck is like the tower of David builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. 5. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies. 6. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense. 7. Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee.

Here is, (1.) A large and particular account of the beauties of the church, and of gracious souls, on whom the image of God is renewed, consisting in the beauty of holiness. In general, he that is a competent judge of beauty, whose judgment we are sure is according to truth, and what all must subscribe to, he hath said, *Behold, thou art fair*. She had commended him, and called all about her to take notice of his glories, and hereby she recommends herself to him, gains his favour, and in return for her respects, he calls to all about him to take notice of her graces. Those that honour Christ, he will honour, 1 Sam. ii. 30. He doth not flatter her, nor design hereby, either to make her proud of her self, or to court her praises of him; but, 1. It is to encourage her under her present dejections; whatever others thought of her, she was amiable in his eyes. 2. It is to teach her what to value her self by, not any external advantages, which would add nothing to her, nor the want of them deprive her of any thing that was really excellent, but by the comeliness of grace which he had put upon her. 3. It is to invite others to think well of her too, and to join themselves to her. Thou art my love, thou lovest me, and art loved of me, and therefore thou art fair; all the beauty of the saints is derived from him, and they shine by reflecting his light: It is the beauty of the Lord our God that is upon us, Psalm xc. 17. She was espoused to him, and that made her beautiful. *Uxor fulget radiis mariti*. It is repeated, *thou art fair*, and again, *thou art fair*, noting not only the certainty of it, but the pleasure he took in speaking of it.

As to the representation here made of the beauty of the church, the images are certainly very bright, the shades strong, and the

comparisons bold; not proper indeed to represent any external beauty, for they were not designed to do so, but the beauty of holiness, the new man, the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible. Several particulars are instanced in, a number of perfection, for the church is enriched with manifold graces; by the seven spirits that are before the throne, Rev. i. 4. 1 Cor. i. 5, 7.

1. Her eyes; a good eye contributes much to a beauty; *thou hast dove's eyes*; clear and chaste; and often cast up towards heaven: It is not the eagle's eye that can face the sun, but the dove's eye; a humble, modest, mournful eye; that is the praise of those whom Christ loves. Ministers are the church's eyes, Isa. lii. 8. *Thy watchmen shall see eye to eye*; they must be like *dove's eyes*, harmless and inoffensive, Matt. x. 16. having their conversation in the world, in simplicity and godly sincerity. Wisdom and knowledge are the eyes of the new man, they must be clear, but not haughty, not exercised in things too high for us. When but aims and intentions are sincere and honest, then we have *dove's eyes*; when we look not unto idols, Ezek. xviii. 6. but have our eyes ever towards the Lord, Psalm xxv. 15. The *dove's eyes* are within the locks, which are as a shade upon them, so that, (1.) They cannot fully see; as long as we are here in this world, we know but in part; for one hair hangs in our eyes, we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness; death will shortly cut those locks, and then we shall see all things clearly. (2.) They cannot be fully seen; but as the stars through the thin clouds. Some make it to intimate the bashfulness of her looks; she suffers not her eyes to wander, but limits them with her locks.

2. Her hair; it is compared to a flock of goats, which looked white, and were on the top of the mountains like a fine head of hair; and the sight was the more pleasant to the spectator, because the goats have not only gravity from their beards, but they are comely in going, Prov. xxx. 31. but it was most pleasant of all to the owner, much of whose riches consisted in his flocks. Christ puts a value upon that in the church, and in believers, which others make no more account of than of their hair; he told his disciples the very hairs of their head were all numbered, as carefully as men number their flocks, Matt. x. 30. and that not a hair of their head should perish, Luke xxi. 18. Some by the hair here understand the outward conversation of a believer, which ought to be comely, and decent, and agreeable to the holiness of the heart; the apostle opposeth good works, such as become the professors of godliness, to the plaiting of the hair, 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10. Mary Magdalen's hair was beautiful when she wiped the feet of Christ with it.

3. Her teeth, ver. 2. Ministers are the church's teeth, that, as nurses, chew the meat for the babes of Christ. The Chaldee paraphrase applies it to the priests and Levites, who fed upon the sacrifices, as the representatives of the people. Faith, by which we feed upon Christ, meditation, by which we ruminate on the word, and chew the cud upon what we have heard, in order to the digesting of it, are the teeth of the new man. These are here compared to a flock of sheep; Christ called his disciples and ministers a little flock. It is the praise of teeth to be even, to be white, and kept clean, like sheep from the washing, and to be firm and well fixed in the gums, and not like sheep that cast their young; for so the word signifies, which we translate barren. It is the praise of ministers to be even in mutual love and concord, to be pure and clean from all moral pollutions, and to be fruitful, bringing forth souls to Christ, and nursing his lambs.

4. Her lips; these are compared to a thread of scarlet, ver. 3. red lips are comely, and a sign of health, as the paleness of the lips is a sign of faintness and weakness; her lips were of the colour of scarlet, but thin lips, like a thread of scarlet; the next words explain it; *thy speech is comely*, always with grace, good, and to the use of edifying, which adds much to the beauty of a christian. When we praise God with our lips, and with the mouth make confession of him to salvation, then they are as a thread of scarlet: All our good works, and good words, must be washed in the blood of Christ, dyed like the scarlet thread; and then, and not till then, they are acceptable to God. The Chaldee applies it to the chief priest, and his prayers for Israel, on the day of atonement.

5. Her temples, or cheeks, which are here compared to a piece of a pomegranate, fruits, which, when cut in two, have red veins or specks in them, like a blush in the face. Humility and modesty, blushing to lift up our faces before God, blushing at the remembrance of sin, and in a sense of our unworthiness of the honour put upon us, will beautify us very much in the eyes of Christ. The blushes of Christ's bride are within her locks, which intimates (saith Mr. Durham) that she blushes when no other sees, and for that which none sees but God and conscience; also, that she seeks not to proclaim her humility, but modestly covers that too, yet the evidences of all these in a tender walk appear and are comely.

6. Her neck; this is here compared to the tower of David, ver. 4. this is generally applied to the grace of faith, by which we are united to Christ, as the body is united to the head by the neck; this is like the tower of David, furnishing us with weapons of war, especially bucklers and shields, as the soldiers were supplied with them out of that tower; for faith is our shield, Eph. vi. 16. they that

that have it never want a *buckler*, for God will compass them *with his favour as with a shield*. When this *neck is like a tower*, straight and stately, and strong, a christian goes on in his way, and works with courage and magnanimity, and doth not hang a drooping head, as he doth when faith fails. Some make the *shields of the mighty men*, that are here said to hang up in *the tower of David*, to be the monuments of the valour of David's worthies; their shields were preserved to keep in remembrance them and their heroic acts, intimating, that it is a great encouragement to the saints to hold up their heads, to see what great things the saints in all ages have done, and won by faith. In *Heb. xi.* we have the *shields of the mighty men* hung up, the exploits of believers, and the trophies of their victories.

7. Her *breasts*; these are like two young *roes that are twins*, ver. 5. The church's breasts are both for ornament, *Ezek. xvi. 7.* and for use, they are the *breasts of her consolation*, *Isa. lxvi. 11.* as she is said to *suck the breast of kings*, *Isa. lx. 16.* Some apply these to the two Testaments, others to the two sacraments, the seals of the covenant of grace; others to the ministers, who are to be spiritual nurses to the children of God, and to give out to them the *sincere milk of the word*, that they may grow thereby; and, in order to that, are themselves to *feed among the lilies*, where Christ feeds; *chap. ii. 16.* that they may be to the babes of the church as full breasts. Or, the breasts of a believer are his love to Christ, which he is pleased with, as the tender husband is with the affections of his wife, who is therefore said to be to him *as the loving hind, and the pleasant roe*, because her breasts satisfy him at all times, *Prov. v. 19.* This includes also his edifying others, and communicating grace to them, which adds much to a christian's beauty.

(2.) The Bridegroom's resolution hereupon to retire to *the mountain of myrrh*, ver. 6. and there to make his residence. This *mountain of myrrh* is supposed to signify the mount Moriah, on which the temple was built, where incense was daily burnt to the honour of God; Christ was so pleased with the beauty of his church, that he chooseth this to be his rest for ever, here he will dwell till the day break, and the shadows flee away. Christ's parting promise to his disciples, as the representatives of the church, answers to this; *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.* Where the ordinances of God are duly administered, there Christ will be, and there we must meet him, at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Some make these to be the words of the spouse, either modestly ashamed of the praises given her, and willing to get out of the hearing of them, or desirous to be constant to the holy hill, not doubting but there to find suitable and sufficient succour and relief in all her streights, and there to cast anchor, and wish for the day, which, at the time appointed, would break, and the shadows flee away. The holy hill (as some observe) is here called both a *mountain of myrrh*, which is bitter; and a *hill of frankincense*, which is sweet, for there we have occasion both to mourn and rejoice; repentance is a bitter sweet, but in heaven it will be all frankincense, and no myrrh. Prayer is compared to incense, and Christ will meet his praying people, and will bless them.

(3.) His repeated commendation of the beauty of his spouse, ver. 7. *Thou art all fair, my love*: He had said, ver. 1. *Thou art fair*, but here he goes further, and in review of the particulars, as of those of the creation, he pronounceth *all very good*, *Thou art all fair, my love*, i. e. thou art all over beautiful, and there is nothing amiss in thee, and thou hast all beauties in thee; thou art sanctified wholly in every part, *all things are become new*, 2 Cor. v. 17. there is not only a new face, and a new name, but a new man; a new nature; *there is no spot in thee*, as far as thou art renewed; the spiritual sacrifices must be without blemish; *there is no spot*, but such as is often the spot of God's children, none of the leopard's spots. The church, when Christ shall present it to himself a glorious church, will be altogether *without spot or wrinkle*, Eph. v. 25.

8. ¶ Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions dens, from the mountains of the leopards. 9. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. 10. How fair is thy love, my sister, my spouse! how much better is thy love than wine! and the smell of thine ointments than all spices! 11. Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb: honey and milk are under thy tongue, and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon. 12. A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse: a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. 13. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, camphire, with spikenard, 14. Spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.

These are still the words of Christ to his church, expressing his great esteem of her, and affection to her; the opinion he had of her beauty and excellency, the desire he had of, and the delight he had in her converse and society. And so ought men to love their wives, as Christ loveth the church, and takes pleasure in it, as if it were spotless, and had no fault, when yet it is compassed with infirmity.

Now, observe here,

1. The endearing names and titles by which he calls her, to express his love to her, to assure her of it, and to engage and excite her love to him. Twice here he calls her *my spouse*, ver. 8, 11. and three times *my sister, my spouse*, ver. 9, 10, 12. Mention was made, *chap. iii. 11.* of the day of his espousals, and after that she is called his spouse, not before. Note, There is a marriage covenant between Christ and his church, between Christ and every true believer. Christ calls his church his spouse, and his calling her so makes her so. I have betrothed thee unto me for ever; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. He is not ashamed to own the relation, but, as becomes a kind and tender husband, he speaks lovingly to her, and calls her his spouse, which cannot but strongly engage her to be faithful to him: Nay, because no one relation among men is sufficient to set forth Christ's love to his church, and to shew that all this must be understood spiritually, he owns her in two relations, which, among men, are incompatible; *my sister, my spouse*: Abraham's saying of Sarah, *she is my sister*, was interpreted a denying of her to be his wife; but Christ's church is to him both a sister and a spouse, as *Matt. xii. 50.* a sister and mother. His calling her sister is grounded upon his taking out nature upon him in his incarnation, and his making us partakers of his nature in our sanctification: He clothed himself with a body, *Heb. ii. 14.* and he clothes believers with his Spirit, 1 Cor. vi. 17: and so they become his sisters: They are children of God his Father, 2 Cor. vi. 18: and so they become his sisters: He that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified are all of one, *Heb. ii. 11.* and he owns them, and loves them as his sisters.

2. The gracious call he gives her to come along with him as a faithful bride; that must forget her own people, and her father's house, and leave all to cleave to him. *Ubi tu Caius, ibi ego Caius.* Come with me from Lebanon, ver. 8.

It is, (1.) A precept, so we take it, like that, *chap. ii. 10, 13.* Rise up, and come away. All that are by faith come to Christ, must come with Christ, in holy obedience to him, and compliance with him: Being joined to him, we must walk with him. This is his command to us daily, *Come with me, my spouse*; come with me to God as a Father, come with me onwards, heavenwards, come forward with me, come up with me: *Come with me from Lebanon, from the top of Amana, from the lions dens.* These mountains are to be considered, 1. As seemingly delightful places; Lebanon is called *that goodly mountain*, *Deut. iii. 25.* We read of the *glory of Lebanon*, *Isa. xxxv. 2.* and its goodly smell, *Hos. xiv. 6.* We read of the pleasant dew of Hermon, *Psal. cxxxiii. 3.* and the joy of Hermon, *Psal. lxxxix. 12.* and we may suppose the other mountains here mentioned to be pleasant ones; and so this is Christ's call to his spouse to come off from the world, all its products, and all its pleasures; to sit loose to all the delights of sense; all those must do so that would come with Christ; they must take their affections off from all present things, yea, though they be placed at the upper end of the world, on the top of Amana, and the top of Shenir, though they enjoy the highest satisfactions the creature can propose to give, yet they must come away from them all, and live above the tops of the highest hills on earth, that they may have their conversation in heaven. Come from those mountains to go along with Christ to the holy mountain, the mountain of myrrh, ver. 6. Even while we have our residence on these mountains, yet we must look from them, look above them: Shall we lift up our eyes to the hills? No; *our help cometh from the Lord*, *Psal. cxxi. 1, 2.* We must look beyond them, to the things that are not seen (as these high hills are) that are eternal. From the tops of Shenir and Hermon, which were on the other side Jordan, as from Pisgah, they could see the land of Canaan; from this world we must look forward to the better country. 2. They are to be considered as really dangerous; these hills indeed are pleasant enough, but there are in them lions dens; they are mountains of the leopards, mountains of prey, though they seem glorious and excellent, *Psal. lxxvi. 4.* Satan, that roaring lion, is the prince of this world, in the things of it he lies in wait to devour; on the tops of these mountains there are many dangerous temptations to those that take up their residence in them, and therefore come with me from them; let us not set our hearts upon the things of this world, and then they can do us no hurt: Come with me from the temples of idolaters; and the societies of wicked people, so some understand it; come out from among them, and be ye separate: Come from under the dominion of your own lusts, which are as lions and leopards, fierce upon us, and making us fierce.

(2.) It may be taken as a promise; thou shalt come with me, from Lebanon, from the lions dens, that is, 1. Many shall be brought home to me, as living members of the church, from every point,

point, from Lebanon in the north, Amana in the west, Hermon in the east, Shenir in the south, from all parts, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Matt. viii. 11. See Isa. xlix. 11, 12. Some from the tops of these mountains, some of the great and topping men of this world, shall give themselves to Christ.

2. The church shall be delivered from her persecutors in due time: Though now she dwells among lions, Psalm lvii. 4. Christ will take her with himself from among their dens.

3. The great delight Christ takes in his church, and in all believers. He delights in them,

(1.) As in an agreeable bride, adorned for her husband, Rev. xxi. 2. who greatly desires her beauty, Psalm xlv. 11. No expressions of love can be more passionate than these here, in which Christ manifests his affection to his church; and yet, that great proof of his love, his dying for it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, goes far beyond them all. A spouse so dearly bought, and paid for, could not but be dearly loved; such a price being given for her, a high value must needs be put upon her accordingly; and both together, may well set us a wondering at the height and depth, and length and breadth of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; that love in which he gave himself for us, and gives himself to us. Observe,

1. How he is affected towards his spouse; *thou hast ravished my heart*; the word is used only here; *thou hast hearted me*, or, *thou hast unhearted me*. New words are coined to express the unexpressibleness of Christ's surprizing love to his church; and the strength of that love is set forth by that which is a weakness in men, being so much in love with one object, as to be heartless to every thing else. This may refer to that love which Christ had to the chosen remnant before the worlds were, when *his delights were with the sons of men*, Prov. viii. 31. that first love which brought him from heaven to earth, to seek and save them at such vast expence, yet including the complacency he takes in them when he brought them to himself. Note, Christ's heart is upon his church; so it has appeared all along; his treasure is in it, it is his peculiar treasure, Exod. xix. 5. and therefore there his heart is also. "Never was love like unto the love of Christ, which made him even mindless of himself when he emptied himself of his glory, and despised all shame and pain for our sakes. The wound of love towards us, which he had from eternity in himself, made him neglect all the wounds and reproaches of the cross;" so bishop Reynolds here. Thus let us love him.

2. What it is that thus affects him with delight.

1. The regard she has to him; *thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes*, those doves eyes, clear and chaste, which were commended, ver. 11. with one glance of those eyes. Christ is wonderfully pleased with those that look unto him as their Saviour, and through the eye of faith dart their affections to him, above any rival whatsoever, and whose eyes are ever towards him; he is soon aware of the first look of a soul towards him, and meets it with his favours.

2. The ornaments she has from him; that is, the obedience she yields to him; for that is the chain of her neck, the graces that enrich her soul, which are connected as links in a chain; the exercise of these graces in a conversation which adorns both her self and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which she professeth to believe, as a gold chain is an ornament to persons of quality, and an entire submission to the commanding power of his law, and the constraining power of his love; having shaken off the bands of our neck, by which we were tied to this world, Isa. lli. 2. and the yoke of our transgressions, we are bound with the cords of love, as chains of gold, to Jesus Christ, and our necks brought under his sweet and easy yoke to draw in it; this recommends us to Jesus Christ, for this is that true wisdom, which, in his account, is an ornament of grace unto the head, and chains about the neck, Prov. i. 9.

3. The affection she has for him; *how fair is thy love!* how beautiful is it! not only thy love it self, but all the fruits and products of it, its workings in the heart, its work in the life. How well doth it become a believer thus to love Christ, and what a pleasure doth Christ take in it! Nothing recommends us to Christ so as this doth. *How much better is thy love than wine!* than all the wine that was poured out to the Lord in the drink-offerings; hence the fruit of the vine is said to cheer God and man, Judges ix. 13. She had said of Christ's love, it is better than wine, chap. i. 2. and now Christ saith so of hers; there is nothing lost by praising Christ, nor will he be behindhand with his friends in kindness.

4. The ointments, the odours wherewith she is perfumed, the gifts and graces of the Spirit, her good works, which are an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God, Phil. iv. 18. The smell of thine ointments is better than all spices, such as the queen of Sheba presented to Solomon, camel-loads of them, 1 Kings x. 2. or, rather than all the spices that were used in compounding the holy incense which was burned daily on the golden altar; love and obedience to God are more pleasing to Christ, than sacrifice or incense: The smell of her garments too, the visible profession she makes of religion, and relation to Christ, before men, and wherein she appears to the world, this is very grateful to Christ,

as the smell of Lebanon. Christ having put upon his spouse the white raiment of his own righteousness, Rev. iii. 18. and the righteousness of saints, Rev. xix. 8. and this perfumed with holy joy and comfort, he is well pleased with it.

5. Her words, both in her devotions to God, and her discourses with men, ver. 11. *Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb*, drop that which is very sweet, and drop it freely and plentifully: If what God speaks to us be sweeter to us than the honey, and the honey-comb, Psalm xix. 10. what we say to him in prayer and praise shall also be pleasing to him; sweet is thy voice: And if out of a good treasure in the heart we bring forth good things, if our speech be always with grace, if our lips use knowledge aright, if they disperse knowledge, they then, in Christ's account, even drop the honey-comb, out-drop it. Honey and milk (the two staple commodities of Canaan) are under thy tongue, i. e. in thy heart; not only reserved there for thy own use, as a sweet morsel for thy self, but ready there for the use of others. In the word of God there is sweet and wholesome nourishment, milk for babes, honey for those that are grown up, Christ is well pleased with those that are full of his word.

(2.) As in a pleasant garden. And well may a very great delight be compared to the delight taken in a garden, when the happiness of Adam in innocency was represented by the putting of him in a garden, a garden of pleasure. This comparison is pursued, ver. 12, 13, 14. The church is fitly compared to a garden, to a garden which, as usual, had a fountain in it; where Solomon made him gardens and orchards, he made him pools of water, Eccl. ii. 5, 6. not only for curiosity and diversion in water-works, but for use to water the gardens; Eden was well watered, Gen. ii. 10. xiii. 10. Observe,

1. The peculiarity of this garden, it is a garden inclosed, a paradise separated from the common earth; it is appropriated to God, he hath set it apart for himself: Israel is God's portion, the lot of his inheritance: It is inclosed for secrecy, the saints are God's hidden ones, therefore the world knows them not; Christ walks in his garden unseen: It is inclosed for safety, a hedge of protection is made about it, which all the powers of darkness cannot either find, or make a gap in: God's vineyard is fenced, Isa. v. 2. there is a wall about it, a wall of fire: It hath a spring in it, and a fountain, but it is a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed, which sends its streams abroad, Prov. v. 16. but is it self carefully locked up, that it may not by any injurious hand be muddied or polluted. The souls of believers are as gardens inclosed, grace in them is as a spring shut up there, in the hidden man of the heart, where the water that Christ gives is a well of living water, John iv. 14. vii. 38. The Old Testament church was a garden inclosed by the partition wall of the ceremonial law, the Bible was then a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed, it was confined to one nation; but now the wall of separation is removed, the gospel preached to every nation, in Jesus Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew.

2. The products of this garden, it is as the garden of Eden, where the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food, Gen. ii. 9. Thy plants, or plantation, are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits, ver. 13. It is not like the vineyard of the man void of understanding, that was all grown over with thorns and nettles; but here are fruits, pleasant fruits, all trees of frankincense, and all the chief spices, ver. 14. Here is great plenty of fruits, and great variety, nothing wanting which might either beautify or enrich this garden, might make it either delightful or serviceable to its great Lord; every thing here is the best of the kind; their chief spices were much more valuable, because much more durable than the choicest of our flowers. Solomon was a great master in botany, as well as other parts of natural philosophy, he treated largely of trees, 1 Kings iv. 33. and, perhaps, had reference to some specifick qualities of the fruits here instanced in, which made them very fit for the purpose for which he alludes to them; but we must be content to observe in general, that saints in the church, and graces in the saints are very fitly compared to these fruits and spices; for, 1. They are planted, and do not grow of themselves; the trees of righteousness are the planting of the Lord, Isa. lxi. 3. grace springs from an incorruptible seed. 2. They are precious, and of high value; hence we read of the precious sons of Zion, and their precious faith; they are plants of renown. 3. They are pleasant, and of a sweet savour to God and man, and as strong aromatics diffuse their fragrantcy. 4. They are profitable, and of great use; saints are the blessings of this earth, and their graces are their riches, with which they trade as the merchants of the east with their spices. 5. They are permanent, and will be preserved to good purpose, when flowers are withered, and good for nothing. Grace reduced into glory will last for ever.

15. A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. 16. Awake, O north-wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out: let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.

These

These seem to be the words of the spouse, the church, in answer to the commendations which Christ the Bridegroom had given of her, as a pleasant, fruitful garden. Is she a garden?

1. She owns her dependence upon Christ himself to make this garden fruitful; to him she has an eye, *ver. 15.* as the *fountain of gardens*, not only the founder of them; by whom they are planted, and to whom they owe their being, but the fountain of them, by whom they are watered; and to whom they owe their continuance and well-being; and without whose constant supplies they would soon become like the dry and barren wilderness; to him she gives all the glory of her fruitfulness; as being nothing without him: *O fountain of gardens*, fountain of all good, of all grace, do not thou fail me. Doth a believer say to the church, *All my springs are in thee*, in thee, O Zion? *Psal. lxxxvii. 7.* the church transmits the praise to Christ; and saith to him, *All my springs are in thee*; thou art *the well of living waters*, *Jer. ii. 13.* out of which flow the *streams from Lebanon*; the river Jordan; that had its rise at the foot of mount Lebanon; and the waters of the sanctuary which issued out *from under the threshold of the house*, *Ezek. xlvi. 1.* They that are gardens to Christ; must acknowledge him a fountain to them, from whose fulness they receive; and to whom it is owing that their souls are as a *watered garden*, *Jer. xxxi. 12.* The city of God on earth is made glad with the river that flows from this fountain, *Psal. xlv. 4.* and the new Jerusalem has its *pure river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb*, *Rev. xxii. 1.*

2. She implores the influences of the blessed Spirit to make this garden fragrant, *ver. 16.* *Awake, O north-wind, and come, thou south.* This is a prayer, 1. For the church in general, that there may be a plentiful effusion of the Spirit upon it; in order to its flourishing estate. Ministers gifts are *the spices*, when the Spirit is poured out, these flow forth; and then the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, *Isa. xxxii. 15.* This prayer was answered in the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of pentecost; *Acts ii. 1.* ushered in by a mighty wind; then the apostles who were bound up before flowed forth; and were a *sweet savour to God*, *2 Cor. ii. 15.* 2. For particular believers. Note, 1. Sanctified souls are as gardens; gardens of the Lord; inclosed for him. 2. Graces in the soul are as spices in these gardens; that in them which is valuable and useful. 3. It is very desirable that the spices of grace should flow forth, both in pious and devout affections; and in holy, gracious actions; that with them we may honour God; adorn our profession; and do that which will be grateful to good men. 4. The blessed Spirit in his operations upon the soul; is as the north and the south-wind; which blows where it listeth; and from several points; *John iii. 8.* There is the north-wind of convictions; and the south-wind of comforts; but all, like the wind; brought out of God's treasures; and fulfilling his word. 5. The flowing forth of the spices of grace depends upon the gales of the Spirit; he stirs up good affections, and works in us both to will and to do that which is good; it is he that makes manifest the savour of his knowledge by us. 6. We ought therefore to wait upon the Spirit of grace for his quickning influences; to pray for them; and to lay our souls under them. God has promised to give us his Spirit; but he will for this be enquired of.

3. She invites Christ to the best entertainment the garden affords. *Let my beloved then come into his garden; and eat his pleasant fruits*; let him have the honour of all the products of the garden; it is fit he should; and let me have the comfort of his acceptance of them, for that is the best account they can be made to turn to. Observe, 1. She calls it *his garden*, for those that are espoused to Christ call nothing their own, but what they have devoted to him; and desire may be used for him. When the spices flow forth; then it is fit to be called *his garden*; and not till then: The fruits of the garden are *his pleasant fruits*, for he both planted them; and watered them; and gave the increase. What can we pretend to merit at Christ's hands; when we can invite him to nothing but what is his own already? 2. She begs he would visit it; and accept of what it produced. The believer can take little pleasure in his garden; unless Christ; the beloved of his soul; come to him; nor have any joy of the fruits of it; unless they redound some way or other to the glory of Christ; and he will think all he has well bestowed upon him.

C H A P. V.

In this chapter we have, 1. Christ's gracious acceptance of the invitation which his church had given him; and the kind visit which he made to her, *ver. 1.* 2. The account which the spouse gives of her own folly in putting a slight upon her beloved, and the plunge she was at by reason of his withdrawings; *ver. 2,--8.* 3. The enquiry of the daughters of Jerusalem concerning the amiable perfections of her beloved, *ver. 9.* and her particular answer to that enquiry; *ver. 10,--16.* Unto you that believe he is thus precious.

1. I Am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have

eaten my honey-comb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.

These words are Christ's answer to the church's prayer in the close of the foregoing chapter, *let my beloved come into his garden*; here he is come, and lets her know it. See how ready God is to hear prayer; how ready Christ is to accept the invitations that his people give him; though we are backward to hear his calls and accept his invitations. He is free in condescending to us, while we are shy of ascending to him. Observe how the return answered the request; and outdid it.

1. She called him *her beloved*, and really she was so; and therefore invited him because she loved him; in return to this he called her his *sister and spouse*, as several times before, *chap. iv.* Those that make Christ their best beloved; shall be owned by him in the nearest and dearest relations.

2. She called the garden *his*, and the pleasant fruits of it *his*, and he acknowledgeth them to be so; it is *my garden*, it is *my spice*. When God was displeased with Israel he turned them off to Moses; they are *thy people*, *Exod. xxxii. 7.* and he called the appointed feasts of the Lord, *their appointed feasts*, *Isa. i. 14.* but now they are in his favour, he owns them for his garden; though of small account; yet it is mine. They that in sincerity give up themselves; and all they have and can do, to Jesus Christ; he will do them the honour to stamp them; and what they have and do for him; with his own mark, and say, *it is mine*.

3. She invited him to *come into his garden*, and he saith, *I am come*, *Isa. lviii. 9.* *Thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.* When Solomon prayed that God would come and take possession of the house he had built for him, he did come; *his glory filled the house*, *2 Chron. vii. 2.* and *ver. 16.* he let him know that he had chosen and sanctified this house; that his *Name might be there for ever*. They that throw open the door of their souls to Jesus Christ; shall find him ready to come into them; and in every place where he records his name he will meet his people and bless them; *Exod. xx. 24.*

4. She desired him to *eat his pleasant fruits*; to accept of the sacrifices offered in his temple; which were as the fruits of his garden; and he doth so; but finds they were not ready for eating; therefore he doth himself gather them; as the fruits are his, so is the preparation of them; he finds the heart unready for his entertainment; but doth himself draw out into exercise those gracious habits which he had planted there. What little good there is in us would be shed and lost; if he did not gather it and preserve it to himself.

5. She only desired him to *eat the fruits* of the garden; but he brought along with him something more, *honey, and wine*; and *milk*, which yield substantial nourishment; and which were the products of Canaan; Immanuel's land. Christ delights himself greatly in that which he hath both conferred upon his people and wrought in them. Or, we may suppose this to have been prepared by the Spouse herself; as Esther prepared for the king her husband; a *banquet of wine*; it is but plain fare; and what is natural; honey and milk; but being kindly designed; it is kindly accepted; imperfections are overlooked; the honey-comb is eaten with the honey; and the weakness of the flesh past by and pardoned; because the *spirit is willing*. When Christ appeared to his disciples after his resurrection; he did eat with them a piece of a honey-comb; *Luke xxiv. 42, 43.* in which this scripture was fulfilled. He did not drink the wine only; which is liquor for men; for great men, but the milk too; which is liquor for children; little children; for he was to be the *holy child Jesus* that had need of milk.

6. She only invited him to come himself; but he bringing his own entertainment along with him; brings his friends too, and invites them to share in the provision. *The more the merrier*; we say; and here where there was so much plenty there was not the worst fare. When our Lord Jesus fed five thousand at once; *they did all eat and were filled*. Christ invites all his friends to the *wine and milk*; which he himself drinks of; *Isa. lv. 1.* to the *feast of fat things*; and *wines on the lees*; *Isa. xxv. 6.* The great work of man's redemption, and the riches of the covenant of grace; are a feast to the Lord Jesus; and they ought to be so to us. The invitation is very free, and hearty; and loving; *Eat, O friends.* If Christ comes to sup with us; it is we that sup with him, *Rev. iii. 20.* *Eat, O friends.* Those only that are Christ's friends are welcome to his table; his enemies; that will have him to reign over them; have no part or lot in the matter. *Drink, yea, drink abundantly.* Christ in his gospel has made plentiful provision for poor souls; he filleth the hungry with good things; there is enough for all; there is enough for each; *we are not straitened in him*, or in his grace; let us not therefore be straitened in our own bosoms; *open thy mouth wide, and Christ will fill it. Be not drunk with wine, be filled with the Spirit*, *Eph. v. 18.* Those that entertain Christ must bid his friends welcome with him; Jesus and his disciples were called together to the marriage, *John ii. 1.* and Christ will have all his friends to rejoice with him in the day of his espousals.

espousals to his church; and in token of that to feast with him. In spiritual and heavenly joys there is no danger of exceeding; there we may *drink abundantly; drink of the river of God's pleasures*, Psa. xxxvi. 8. and be *abundantly satisfied*, Psa. lxxv. 4.

2. I sleep, but my heart waketh: *it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.* 3. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them? 4. My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. 5. I rose up to open to my beloved, and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. 6. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer. 7. The watchmen that went about the city, found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my vail from me. 8. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.

In this song of loves and joys we have here a very melancholy scene; the spouse here speaks not to her beloved, as before, for he is withdrawn, but of him, and it is a sad story she tells, of her own folly and ill carriage towards him, notwithstanding his kindness, and of the just rebukes she fell under for it; perhaps it may refer to Solomon's own apostasy from God, and the sad effects of that apostasy, after God had come into his garden, had taken possession of the temple he had built, and he had feasted with God upon the sacrifices, *ver. 1.* however, it is applicable to the too common case of churches and particular believers, who by their carelessness and security, provoke Christ to withdraw from them. Observe,

1. The indisposition that the spouse was under, and the listlessness that had seized her, *ver. 2. I sleep, but my heart wakes.* Here is, (1.) Corruption appearing in the actions of it, *I sleep*; the wise virgins slumbered. She was *on her bed*, chap. iii. 1. but now she sleeps: spiritual distempers, if not striven against at first, are apt to grow upon us and to get ground. *She slept*, i. e. pious affections cooled, she neglected her duty, and grew remiss in it, she indulged herself in her ease, was secure and off her watch. This is sometimes the bad effect of more than ordinary enlargements, a good cause, St. Paul himself was in danger of being puffed up with abundant revelations, and of saying, *Soul, take thine ease*, which made a *thorn in the flesh* necessary for him, to keep him from sleeping. Christ's disciples, when he was come into his garden, the garden of his agony, were heavy with sleep, and could not watch with him. True christians are not always alike lively and vigorous in religion. (2.) Grace remaining, notwithstanding, in the habit of it, *my heart wakes*, my own conscience reproacheth me for it, and ceaseth not to rouse me out of my sluggishness. *The spirit is willing*, and, *after the inner man I delight in the law of God*, and *with my mind I serve that*. I am for the present overpowered by temptation, but all doth not go one way in me. I sleep, but it is not a dead sleep, I strive against it, it is not a sound sleep, I cannot be easy under this indisposition. Note, 1. We ought to take notice of our own spiritual slumbers and distempers, and to reflect upon it with sorrow and shame that we have fallen asleep when Christ has been nigh us in his garden. 2. When we are lamenting what is amiss in us, we must not overlook the good that is wrought in us, and preserved alive. My heart wakes in Christ, who is dear to me as my own heart, and is my life; when I sleep, *he neither slumbers nor sleeps*.

2. The call that Christ gave to her when she was under this indisposition: *It is the voice of my beloved*, she knew it to be so, and was soon aware of it, which was a sign that her heart was awake. Like the child Samuel, he heard at the first call, but did not, like him, mistake the person, she knew it to be the voice of Christ. He knocks, to awaken us to come and let him in; knocks by his Word and Spirit, knocks by afflictions, and by our own consciences; though this be not expressly quoted, yet, probably, it is referred to, *Rev. iii. 20. Behold, I stand at the door and knock.* He calls sinners into covenant with him, and faints into communion with him. Those whom he loves he will not let alone in their carelessness, but will find some way or other to awaken them, to rebuke and chasten them. When we are unmindful of Christ, he thinks of us, and provides that our faith fail not. Peter denied Christ, but the Lord turned and looked upon him, and so brought him to himself again.

Observe how moving the call is; *Open to me, my sister, my love.* (1.) He sues for entrance who may demand it; and knocks, who

could easily knock the door down. (2.) He gives her all the kind and most endearing titles imaginable, *My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled*; he not only gives her no hard names, nor upbraids her with unkindness in not sitting up for him; but, on the contrary, studies how to express his tender affection to her still; *his loving-kindness he will not utterly take away*. Those that, by faith, are espoused to Christ, he looks upon as his sisters, his loves, his doves, and all that is dear; and, being clothed with his righteousness, they are undefiled. This consideration should induce her to open to him: Christ's love to us should engage ours to him, even in the most self-denying instances. *Open to me*. Can we deny entrance to such a friend? to such a guest? Shall we not converse more with one that is infinitely worthy of our acquaintance, and so affectionately desirous of it, though we only can be gainers by it. (3.) He pleads distress, and begs to be admitted, *sub forma pauperis*, under the character of a poor traveller that wants a lodging. *My head is wet with the dew*, with the cold drops of the night; consider what hardships I have undergone to merit for thee, which sure may merit from thee so small a kindness as this. When Christ was crowned with thorns, which, no doubt, fetched blood from his blessed head, then was his head *wet with the dew*; consider what a grief it is to me to be thus unkindly used, as much as it would be to a tender husband to be kept out of doors by his wife in a rainy, stormy night. Do we thus requite him for his love? The slights which careless souls put upon Jesus Christ are to him as a *continual dropping in a very rainy day*.

3. The excuse she made to put off her compliance with this call, *ver. 3. I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on again?* She is half a sleep, she knows the voice of her beloved, she knows his knock, but cannot find in her heart to open to him; she was undressed, and would not be at the pains to dress her again; had *washed her feet*, and would not have occasion to wash them again. She could not send another to open the door; (it must be our own act and deed to let Christ into our hearts) and yet she was loth to go herself; she did not say, *I will not open*; but, *How shall I?* Note, Frivolous excuses are the language of prevailing slothfulness in religion; Christ calls to us to open to him, but we pretend we have no mind, or we have no strength, or we have no time, and therefore think we may be excused; as the *sluggard that will not plow by reason of cold*. And those who ought to *watch for the Lord's coming*, with their *loins girt*, if they ungird themselves and put off their coat, they will find it difficult to recover their former resolution, and to put it on again; it is best therefore to keep tight. Making excuses, *Luke xiv. 18.* is interpreted making light of Christ, *Matth. xxii. 5.* and so it is. Those put a great contempt upon Christ, that cannot find in their hearts to bear a cold blast for him, or get out of a warm bed.

4. The powerful influences of divine grace, by which she was made willing to rise and open to her beloved. When he could not prevail with her by persuasion, he *put in his hand by the hole of the door*, to unbolt it, as one weary of waiting, *ver. 4.* This intimates a work of the Spirit upon her soul, by which she was, of unwilling, made willing, *Psa. cx. 3.* The conversion of Lydia is represented by the *opening of her heart*, *Acts xvi. 14.* and Christ is said to open his disciples understandings, *Luke xxiv. 45.* He that *formed the spirit of man within him*, knows all the avenues to it, and which way to enter into it, he can find the *hole of the door*, at which to put in his hand for the conquering of prejudices, and the introducing of his own doctrine and law. He has the *key of David*, *Rev. iii. 7.* with which he opens the door of the heart in such a way as is suited to it, as the key is fitted to the wards of the lock, in such a way as not to put a force upon its nature, but only upon its ill nature.

5. Her compliance with these methods of divine grace at last, *my bowels were moved for him*. The will was gained by a good work wrought upon the affections, *my bowels were moved for him*, as those of the two disciples were when Christ made their *heart to burn within them*. She was moved with compassion to her beloved, because his *head was wet with the dew*. Note; Tenderness of spirit, and a heart of flesh prepares the soul for the reception of Christ into it, and therefore his love to us is represented in such a way as is most affecting. Did Christ redeem us in his pity, let us in pity receive him, and those that are his for his sake, when at any time they are in distress.

This good work wrought upon her affections raised her up, and made her ashamed of her dulness and slothfulness, *ver. 5. I rose up to open to my beloved*; his grace inclining her to do it, and conquering the opposition of unbelief. It was her own act, and yet he wrought it in her. And now her *hands dropped with myrrh upon the handles of the lock*. Either, 1. She found it there, when she applied her hand to the lock to shoot it back; he that *put in his hand by the hole of the door*, left it there as an evidence that he had been there. When Christ has wrought powerfully upon a soul, he leaves a blessed sweetness in it, which is very delightful to it; with this he oiled the lock to make it go easy. Note, When we apply ourselves to our duty in the lively exercises of faith, under

under the influence of divine grace, we shall find it will go on much more readily and sweetly than we expected. If we will but rise up to open to Christ, we shall find the difficulty we apprehended in it strangely overcome, and shall say with Daniel, *Now let my Lord speak, for thou hast strengthened me*, Dan. x. 19. 1. Or, 2. She brought it thither. Her *beavels being moved for her beloved*, who had stood so long in the cold and wet, when she came to open to him she prepared to anoint his head, and so to refresh and comfort him, and perhaps to prevent his catching cold; she was in such haste to meet him, that she would not stay to make the usual preparation, but dipped her hand in her box of ointment, that she might readily anoint his head at his first coming in. Those that open the doors of their hearts to Christ, those *everlasting doors*, must meet him with the lively exercises of faith and other graces, and with these must anoint him.

6. Her sad disappointment when she did open to her beloved. And here is the most melancholy part of the story. *I opened to my beloved*, as I intended, but, alas, *my beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone*, my beloved *was gone, was gone*, so the word is. She did not open to him at his first knock, and now she came too late, when afterwards she *would have inherited this blessing*. Christ will be sought while he may be found, if we slip our time we lose our passage. Note, 1. Christ justly rebukes our delays with his denials, and suspends the communications of comfort from those that are remiss and drowsy in their duty. 2. Christ's departures are matter of great grief and lamentation to believers. The royal psalmist never complains of any thing with such sorrowful accents as God's *hiding his face* from him, and *casting him off*, and *forsaking him*. The spouse here is ready to tear her hair, and rend her clothes, and wrings her hands, crying, *He is gone, he is gone*, and that which cuts her to the heart is, that she may thank herself, she provoked him to withdraw. If Christ depart, it is because he takes something unkindly.

Now observe what she doth in this case, and what befel her.

1. She still calls him her *beloved*, being resolved, how cloudy and dark soever the day be, she will not quit her relation to him, and interest in him. It is a weakness upon every apprehension, either of our own failings, or God's withdrawals, to conclude hardly as to our spiritual state. Every desertion is not despair. I will say, *Lord, I believe*, though I must say, *Lord, help my unbelief*. Though he leave me, I love him, he is mine.

2. She now remembers the words he said to her when he called her, and what impressions they made upon her, reproaching herself for her folly in not complying sooner with her convictions. *My soul failed when he spake*; his words melted me when he said, *My head is wet with the dew*; and yet, wretch that I was, I lay still and made excuses, and did not open to him. The smothering and stifling of our convictions is a thing that will be very bitter in the reflection, when God opens our eyes. Sometimes the word hath not its effect presently upon the heart, but it melts it afterwards, upon second thoughts: *My soul now melted because of his words* which he had spoken before.

3. She did not go to bed again, but went in pursuit of him. *I sought him, I called him*. She might have saved herself this labour if she would but have bestirred herself when he first called: but we cut ourselves out a great deal of work, and create ourselves a great deal of trouble by our slothfulness and carelessness in improving our opportunities. Yet it is her praise, that when her beloved is withdrawn, she continues seeking him; her desires towards him are made more strong, and her enquiries after him more solicitous by his withdrawals. She calls him by prayer, calls after him, and begs of him to return; and she doth not only pray, but useth means, she seeks him in the ways wherein she used to find him.

4. Yet still she mist of him: *I could not find him, he gave me no answer*. She had no evidences of his favour, no sensible comforts, but was altogether in the dark, and in doubt concerning his love towards her. Note, There are those who have a true love for Christ, and yet have not immediate answers to their prayers for his smiles; but he gives them an equivalent, if he strengthens them with strength in their souls to continue seeking him, *Psal. cxxxviii*. 3. St. Paul could not prevail for the removing of the *thorn in the flesh*, but was answered with grace sufficient for him.

5. She was ill treated by the watchmen, *they found me, they smote me, they wounded me*, ver. 7. They took her for a lewd woman, because she went about the streets at that time of night; when they were walking their rounds, and beat her accordingly. Disconsolate saints are taken for sinners, and are censured and reproached as such. Thus Hannah, when she was praying in the bitterness of her soul, was wounded and smitten by Eli, one of the prime watchmen, when he said to her, *How long wilt thou be drunken?* so counting her a daughter of Belial, 1 Sam. i. 14, 15. It is no new thing for those that are of the loyal loving subjects of Zion's King, to be misrepresented by the watchmen of Zion, as enemies, or scandals to his kingdom; they could not abuse and persecute them but by putting them into an ill name. Some apply it to those ministers who, though watchmen by office, yet

misapply the word to awakened consciences, and through unskilfulness or contempt of their griefs, add afflictions to the afflicted, and *make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom God would not have made sad*, Ezek. xiii. 22. discouraging those who ought to be encouraged, and talking to the grief of those whom God has wounded, *Psal. lix*. 26. Those watchmen were bad enough that could not, or would not, assist the spouse in her enquiries after her beloved, chap. iii. 3. but these were much worse that hindered her with their severe and uncharitable censures; *smote her and wounded her* with their reproaches; and though they were the *keepers of the wall of Jerusalem*, as if they had been the breakers of it, *took away her veil* from her rudely and barbarously, as if it had been only a pretence of modesty, but a cover of the contrary. They whose outward appearances are all good, and yet are invidiously condemned and run down for hypocrites, have reason to complain, as the spouse here, of the *taking away of their veil* from them.

6. When she was disabled by the abuses the watchmen gave her to prosecute her enquiry herself, she gave charge to those about her to assist her in the enquiry, ver. 8. *I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, all my friends and acquaintance, if you find my beloved*, it may be you may meet with him before I shall, *what shall ye tell him?* so some read it; speak a good word for me, and tell him that *I am sick of love*. Observe here, (1.) What her condition was; she loved Jesus Christ to that degree that his absence made her sick, extremely sick, she could not bear it, and she was in pain for his return, as a woman in travail, as Ahab for Naboth's vineyard, which he so passionately coveted. This is a sickness which is a sign of a healthful constitution of soul, and will certainly end well; a sickness that will be not death, but life. It is better be sick of love to Christ, than at ease in love to the world. (2.) What course she took in this condition: she did not sink into despair, and conclude she should die of her disease, but she sent after her beloved; she asked the advice of her neighbours, and begged their prayers for her, that they would intercede with him on her behalf; tell him, though I should have done to open to him, yet I love him; he *knows all things*, he *knows that I do*; represent me to him as sincere, though in many instances coming short of my duty; nay, represent me to him as an object of his pity, that he may have compassion on me and help me. She doth not bid them tell him how the watchmen had abused her, how unrighteous soever they were in it, she acknowledgeth that *the Lord is righteous*, and therefore bears it patiently; but tell him that I am wounded with love to him, Gracious souls are more sensible of Christ's withdrawals, than of any other trouble whatsoever.

Languet amans, non languet amor.

9. *What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women?* What is thy beloved more than another beloved; that thou dost so charge us? 10. My beloved is white and ruddy; the chiefest among ten thousand. 11. His head is as the most fine gold, his locks are bushy, and black as a raven. 12. His eyes are as the eyes of doves by the rivers of waters, washed with milk, and fitly set. 13. His cheeks are as a bed of spices, as sweet flowers: his lips like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh. 14. His hands are as gold rings set with beryl: his belly is as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires. 15. His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars. 16. His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved; and this is my friend; O daughters of Jerusalem.

Here is, 1. The question which the daughters of Jerusalem put to the spouse concerning her beloved; in answer to the charge she had given them, ver. 9. Observe,

(1.) The respectful title they give to the spouse, *O thou fairest among women*. Our Lord Jesus makes his spouse truly amiable, not only in his eyes, but in the eyes of all the daughters of Jerusalem. The church is the most excellent society in the world; the communion of saints the best communion, and the beauty of the sanctuary a transcendent beauty; the saints are the most excellent people; holiness is the symmetry of the soul; it is its agreement with itself, it recommends itself to all that are competent judges of it, even those that have little acquaintance with Christ, as those daughters of Jerusalem here, yet cannot but see an amiable beauty in those that bear his image; which we should love wherever we see it, though in different dresses.

(2.) Their enquiry concerning her beloved: *What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* If thou wilt have us to find him for thee, give us his marks that we may know him when we see him.

1. Some take it for a slighty question, blaming her for making such ado about him. Why shouldst thou be so passionate in enquiring after thy beloved, more than others are after theirs? Why shouldst thou be so set upon him more than others that yet have a kindness for him? Those that are zealous in religion, are men wondered at by such as are indifferent to it. The many careless ones laugh at the few that are solicitous and serious. What is there in him that is so very charming more than in another person? If he be gone, thou that art the fairest among women, wilt soon have another with an equal flame. Note, Carnal hearts see nothing excellent or extraordinary in the Lord Jesus; in his person, or offices, in his doctrine, or in his favours; as if there were no more in the knowledge of Christ, and in communion with him, than in the knowledge of the world, and in its conversation.

2. Others rather take it for a serious question, and by it they intended, (1.) To comfort the spouse, who, they knew, would recover new spirits, if she did but talk a while of her beloved; and that nothing would please her better, nor give a more powerful diversion to her grief, than to be put upon the pleasing talk of describing the beauties of her beloved. (2.) To inform themselves; they had heard, in general, that he was excellent and glorious, but they desired to know more particularly. They wondered what moved the spouse to charge them concerning her beloved with so much vehemence and concern, and therefore conclude, there must be something more in him than in another beloved, which they are willing to be convinced of. Then they begin to be some hopes of people, when they begin to enquire concerning Christ, and his transcendent perfections. And sometimes the extraordinary zeal of one in enquiring after Christ, may be a means to provoke many, 2 Cor. ix. 2. as the apostle, by the faith of the Gentiles, would stir up the Jews to a holy emulation, Rom. xi. 14. See John iv. 10.

2. The account which the spouse gives of her beloved in answer to this question. We should always be ready to instruct and assist those that are enquiring after Christ. Experienced Christians that are well acquainted with Christ themselves, should do all they can to bring others acquainted with him.

1. She assures them in general, that he is one of incomparable perfections and unparalleled worth, ver. 10. Do not you know my beloved? Can the daughters of Jerusalem be ignorant of him that is Jerusalem's crown, and crowned Head? Let me tell you then,

(1.) That he has every thing in him that is lovely and amiable. *My beloved is white and ruddy*, the colours that make up a compleat beauty. This points not at any extraordinary beauty of his body when he should be incarnate. It was never said of the child Jesus, as of the child Moses when he was born, that he was exceeding fair, Acts vii. 20. nay, *he had no form nor comeliness*, Isa. liii. 2. but his divine Glory, and the concurrence of every thing in him as Mediator, to make him truly lovely in the eyes of those that are enlightened to discern spiritual things. In him we may behold the *beauty of the Lord*, he was the *holy child Jesus*; that was his fairness. If we look upon him as made to us *wise, righteous, sanctification and redemption*, he appears in all very amiable. His love to us renders him lovely; he is *white* in the spotless innocency of his life, *ruddy* in the bloody sufferings he went through at his death. *White* in his glory, as God, when he was transfigured, *his raiment was white as the light*; *ruddy* in his assuming the nature of man, Adam, *red earth*. *White* in his tenderness towards his people; *ruddy* in his terrible appearances against his and their enemies. His complexion is a very happy composition.

(2.) That he has that loveliness in him which is not to be found in any other: He is *chiefest among ten thousand*; a nonsuch for beauty, *fairer than the children of men*, than any of them, than all of them, there is none like him, nor any to be compared with him, every thing else is to be accounted *less and dung in comparison of him*, Phil. iii. 8. He is *higher than the kings of the earth*, Psal. lxxxix. 27. and has *obtained a more excellent name* than any of the principalities and powers of the upper or lower world, Phil. ii. 9. *He is a Man of Sorrows among ten thousand*, so the word is, the tallest and comeliest of the company: He is himself *lifted up as an ensign*, Isa. xi. 10. to whom we must be gathered, and must always have an eye. And there is all the reason in the world that he should have the innermost and uppermost place in our souls, who is the *fairest of ten thousands* in himself, and the *finest of twenty thousands* for us.

2. She gives a particular detail of his accomplishments, conceals not his power, or comely proportion, every thing in Christ is amiable. Ten instances she here gives of his beauty, which we need not be nice in the application of, lest the wringing of them bring forth blood, and prove the wresting of them: the design, in general, is to shew, that he is every way qualified for his undertaking, and has all that in him which may recommend him to our esteem, love, and confidence. Christ's appearance to John, Rev. i. 13, &c. may be compared with the description which the spouse gives of him here, the scope of both being to represent

him transcendently glorious, that is, both great and gracious, made lovely in the eyes of believers, and making them happy in himself.

1. *His head is as the most fine gold*: The head of Christ is God, 1 Cor. xi. 3. and it is promised to the saints that *the Almighty shall be their gold*, Job xxii. 25. their defence, their treasure, much more was he so to Christ, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, Col. ii. 9. Christ's head speaks his sovereign dominion over all, and his vital influence upon his church, and all its members; this is as *gold, gold*; the former word signifies shining gold, the latter strong, solid gold; Christ's sovereignty is both beautiful and powerful. Nebuchadnezzar's monarchy is compared to a *head of gold*, Dan. ii. 38. because it excelled all the other monarchies, and so doth Christ's government.

2. *His locks are bushy and black*, not black as the tents of Kedar, whose blackness was their deformity, to which therefore the church compares her self, chap. i. 5: but *black as a raven*, whose blackness is his beauty. Sometimes Christ's hair is represented as *white*, Rev. i. 14. noting his eternity; that he is *the Ancient of days*, but here as *black and bushy*, speaking him ever young, and that there is in him no decay, nothing that waxeth old. Every thing that belongs to Christ is amiable in the eyes of a believer; even his hair is so; it was pity it should be wet as it was *with the dew*, and these *locks with the drops of the night*, while he waited to be gracious, ver. 2.

3. *His eyes are as the eyes of doves*, fair and clear, and chaste and kind, *by the rivers of waters*, which doves delight in, and in which, as in a glass, they see themselves; they are washed to make them clean, *washed with milk* to make them white, and *fitly set*, neither starting out, nor sunk in. Christ is of *purser eyes than to behold iniquity*, for they are doves eyes, Hab. i. 13. All believers speak with pleasure of the omniscience of Christ, as the spouse here of *his eyes*; for though it be terrible to his enemies as *a flame of fire*, Rev. i. 14. yet it is amiable and comfortable to his friends as *doves eyes*; for it is a witness to their integrity; *thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*. Blessed and holy are they that walk always as under the eye of Christ.

4. *His cheeks (the risings of the face) are as a bed of spices*, raised in the gardens, which are the beauty and wealth of them, and as *sweet flowers*, or towers of sweetness. There is that in Christ's countenance which is amiable in the eyes of all the saints, in the least glimpse of him, for the cheek is but a part of the face: The half discoveries Christ makes of himself to the soul are reviving and refreshing, fragrant above the richest flowers and perfumes.

5. *His lips are like lilies*, not white like lilies, but sweet and pleasant; such are the *words of his lips* to all that are sanctified, *sweeter than honey, and the honey-comb*; such the *kisses of his lips*, all the communications of his grace: *Grace is poured into his lips*, and they that heard him *wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth*. His lips are as *lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh*. Never any lilies in nature dropped myrrh, but nothing in nature can fully set forth the beauty and excellency of Christ, and therefore to do it by comparison, there must be a composition of images.

6. *His hands are as gold rings set with the beryl*, a noted precious stone, ver. 14. Great men had their hands adorned with gold rings on their fingers set with diamonds, or other precious stones, but in her eye *his hands themselves were as gold rings*; all the instances of his power, the works of his hands, all the performances of his providence and grace, are all rich and pure, and precious as gold, as the *precious emerald and the sapphire*; all fitted to the purpose for which they were designed, as *gold rings to the finger*; and all beautiful and very becoming, as *rings set with beryl*. His hands which are stretched forth, both to receive his people, and to give to them, are thus rich and comely.

7. *His bowels are as bright ivory*, for so it should be rendred, rather than *his belly*, for it is the same word that was used for *bowels*, ver. 4. and is often ascribed to God, as *Isa. lxiii. 15. Jer. xxxi. 20.* and so it notes his tender compassion and affection for his spouse, and the love he has to her, even in her desolate and deserted state. This love of his is like *bright ivory*, finely polished, and richly overlaid with *sapphires*. The love it self is strong and firm, and the instances and circumstances of it are bright and sparkling, and add much to the inestimable value of it.

8. *His legs are as pillars of marble*, so strong, so stately, and no disgrace, no not to the *sockets of fine gold upon which they are set*, ver. 15. This speaks his stability and steadfastness, where he sets his foot he will fix it; he is able to bear all the weight of the government that is upon his shoulders, and his legs will never fail under him; this sets forth the stateliness and magnificence of *the goings of our God, our King, in his sanctuary*, Psalm lxviii. 24. and the steadiness and evenness of all his dispensations towards his people: *The ways of the Lord are equal*, they are all *mercy and truth*, these are the *pillars of marble*, more lasting than the pillars of heaven.

9. *His countenance, his port and mien, is as Lebanon*, that stately hill, his aspect beautiful and charming, like the prospect of that pleasant

pleasant forest or park, *excellent as the cedars*, which, in height and strength, excel other trees, and are of excellent use. Christ is a goodly person, the more we look upon him, the more beauty we shall see in him.

10. *His mouth is most sweet*, it is sweetness it self, it is *sweetnesses*, so the word is, it is pure essence, nay, it is the quintessence of all delights, *ver. 16.* The words of his mouth are all sweet to a believer, sweet as milk to babes, to whom it is agreeable, as honey to those that are grown up, *Psaln cxix. 103.* to whom it is delicious: The kisses of his mouth, all the tokens of his love, have a transcendent sweetness in them, and are most delightful to them who have their *spiritual senses exercised*: *To you that believe he is precious.*

(3.) She concludes with a full assurance both of faith and hope, and so gets the mastery of her trouble.

1. Here is a full assurance of faith concerning the compleat beauty of the Lord Jesus: *He is altogether lovely.* What should I stand to mention particulars, when throughout there is nothing amiss. She is sensible she doth him wrong in the particular descriptions of him, and comes far short of the dignity and merit of the subject, and therefore she breaks off with this general encomium; *he is truly lovely*, he is wholly so; there is nothing in him but what is amiable, and nothing amiable but what is in him; he is all desires, he has all in him that one can desire, and therefore all her desire is towards him, and she seeks him thus carefully, and cannot rest contented in the want of him. Who can but love him who is so lovely?

2. Here is a full assurance of hope concerning her own interest in him: *This is my beloved, and this is my friend*, and therefore wonder not that I thus long after him. See with what a holy boldness she claims relation to him; and then with what a holy triumph she proclaims it. It is propriety that sweetens excellency. To see Christ, and not to see him as ours, would be rather a torture than a happiness; but to see one that is thus lovely, and to see him as ours, is a compleat satisfaction. Here is a true believer,

(1.) Giving an entire consent to Christ, he is mine; *my Lord, and my God*, John xx. 28. mine, according to the tenor of the gospel covenant; mine, in all relations; bestowed upon me, to be all that to me that my poor soul stands in need of.

(2.) Taking an entire complacency in Christ. It is spoken of here with an air of triumph; this is he whom I have chosen, and to whom I have given up my self; none but Christ, none but Christ; this is he on whom my heart is, for he is my best beloved; this is he in whom I trust, and from whom I expect all good, for *this is my friend*. Note, Those that make Christ their beloved, shall have him their friend; he has been, is, and will be a special friend to all believers. He loves those that love him: And those that have him their friend have reason to glory in him, and speak of him with delight. Let others be governed by the love of the world; and seek their happiness in its friendship and favours, *this is my beloved, and this is my friend*: Others may do as they please, but this is my soul's choice, my soul's rest, my life, my joy, my all; this is he whom I desire to live and die with.

C H A P. VI.

In this chapter, 1. The daughters of Jerusalem, moved with the description which the church had given of Christ, enquire after him, *ver. 1.* 2. The church directs them where they may meet with him, *ver. 2, 3.* 3. Christ is now found of those that sought him, and very highly applauds the beauty of his spouse, as one extremely smitten with it, *ver. 4, — 7.* preferring her before all others, *ver. 8, 9.* and recommending her to the love and esteem of all her neighbours, *ver. 10.* And lastly, acknowledging the impressions which her beauty had made upon him, and the great delight he took in it, *ver. 11, 12, 13.*

1. **W**Hither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee. 2. My beloved is gone down into his garden; to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. 3. I am my beloveds, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.

Here is, 1. The enquiry which the daughters of Jerusalem made concerning Christ, *ver. 1.* they still continue their high thoughts of the church; and call her, as before, the *fairest among women*; for true sanctity is true beauty: And now they raise their thoughts higher concerning Christ, *Whither is thy beloved gone? that we may seek him with thee.* This would be but an indecent; unacceptable compliment, if the song were not to be understood spiritually; for love is jealous of a rival, would monopolize the beloved, and cares not that others should join in seeking him, but they that truly love Christ, are desirous that others should love him too, and be joined to him; nay, the greatest instance of duty and respect

that the church's children can shew to their mother, is to join with her in seeking Christ.

The daughters of Jerusalem that had asked, *chap. v. 9. What is thy beloved more than another beloved?* wondering that the spouse should be so passionately in love with him, are now of another mind, and are themselves in love with him; for, 1. The spouse had described him, and shewed them his excellencies and perfections, and therefore, though they have not seen him, yet, believing, they love him. They that undervalue Christ, it is because they do not know him; when God, by his word and Spirit, discovers him to the soul, with that ray of light, the fire of love to him will be kindled. 2. She had expressed her own love to him, her rest in that love, and had triumphed in it; *this is my beloved*; and that flame in her breast scattered sparks into theirs: As sinful lusts, when they break out, defile many; so the pious zeal of some may provoke many, 2 Cor. ix. 2.

The spouse had bespoken their help in seeking her beloved, *chap. v. 8.* but now they beg hers, for they perceive that now the cloud she had been under began to scatter, and the sky to clear up, and, while she was describing her beloved to them, she herself retrieved her comfort in him. Drooping christians would find benefit themselves by talking of Christ, as well as do good to others.

Now here, 1. They enquire concerning him, *Whither is thy beloved gone?* which way must we steer our course in pursuit of him? Note, Those that are made acquainted with the excellencies of Christ, and the comfort of an interest in him, cannot but be inquisitive after him, and desirous to know where they may meet with him. 2. They offer their service to the spouse, to accompany her in quest of him; *we will seek him with thee.* Those that would find Christ must seek him, seek him early, seek him diligently; and it is best seeking Christ in consort, to join with those that are seeking him: We must seek for communion with Christ, in communion with saints. We know *whither our beloved is gone*, he is gone to heaven, to his Father, and our Father, he took care to send us notice of it, that we might know how to direct to him, *John xi. 17.* We must by faith see him there, and by prayer seek him there; with boldness enter into the holiest, and herein must join with the generation of them that seek him, *Psaln xxiv. 6.* even with all that in every place call upon him, 1 Cor. i. 2. We must pray with, and for others.

2. The answer which the spouse gave to this enquiry, *ver. 2, 3.* Now she complains not any more, as she had done, *chap. v. 6.* he is gone, he is gone, that she knew not where to find him, or doubted she had lost him for ever; no, (1.) Now she knows very well where he is, *ver. 2. My beloved is not to be found in the streets of the city*, and the crowd and noise that is there, there I have in vain looked for him, as his parents sought him among their kindred and acquaintance, and found him not, but he is gone down to his garden, a place of privacy and retirement; the more we withdraw from the hurry of the world, the more likely we are to have acquaintance with Christ, who took his disciples into a garden, there to be witnesses of the agonies of his love. Christ's church is a garden, inclosed and separated from the open common of the world; it is his garden, which he hath planted, as he did the garden of Eden, which he takes care of, and delights in: Though he is gone up to paradise above, yet he comes down to his garden on earth; it lies low, but he condescends to visit it; and wonderful condescension it is: Will God in very deed dwell with man upon the earth? Those that would find Christ, may expect to meet with him in his garden: the church, for there he records his name, *Exod. xx. 24.* they must attend upon him in the ordinances which he hath instituted, the word, sacraments, and prayer, wherein he will be with us always, even to the end of the world. The spouse here refers to what Christ had said, *chap. v. 1. I am come into my garden*, q. d. what a fool was I to fret and toil myself in seeking him where he was not, when he himself had told me where he was. Words of direction and comfort are many times out of the way when we have occasion to use them, till the blessed Spirit brings them to our remembrance, and then we wonder how we overlooked them: Christ has told us he would come into his garden, thither therefore we must go to seek him.

The beds, and lesser gardens in this greater, are the particular churches, the synagogues of God in the land, *Psaln lxxiv. 8.* the spices and lilies are particular believers, the planting of the Lord, and pleasant in his eyes. When Christ comes down to his church, it is, 1. To feed among the gardens, to feed his flock, which he feeds not as other shepherds in the open fields, but in his garden; so well are they provided for! *Psaln xxiii. 2.* To feed his friends, and entertain them; there you may not only find him, but find his table richly furnished, and hearty welcome to it. To feed himself, i. e. to please himself with the products of his own grace in his people; for the Lord taketh pleasure in those that fear him. He hath many gardens, many particular churches of different sizes and shapes, but while they are his, he feeds in them all, manifests himself among them, and is well pleased with them. 2. To gather lilies, wherewith he is pleased to entertain and adorn himself; he picks the lilies one by one; and gathers them to himself; and there will be a general harvest of them at the great day, when he will send

send forth his angels to gather all his lilies, that he may be for ever glorified and admired in them.

(2.) She is very confident of her own interests in him, *ver. 3. I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine*; the relation is mutual, and the knot is tied, which cannot be loosed, for *he feedeth among the lilies*, and my communion with him is a certain token of my interest in him. She had said this before, *chap. ii. 16.* but, *1.* Here she repeats it, as that which she resolved to abide by, and which she took an unspeakable pleasure and satisfaction in; she liked her choice too well to change. Our communion with God is very much maintained and kept up, by the frequent renewing of our covenant with him, and rejoicing in it. *2.* She had occasion to repeat it, for she had carried it unkindly to her beloved, and for her so doing he had justly withdrawn himself from her, and therefore there was occasion to take fresh hold of the covenant, which continues firm between Christ and believers, notwithstanding their failings, and his frowns, *Psal. lxxxix. 30.—35.* I have been careless and wanting in my duty, and yet *I am my beloved's*; for every transgression in the covenant doth not throw us out of covenant; he hath justly hid his face from me, and denied me his comforts, and yet *my beloved is mine*; for rebukes and chastenings are not only consistent with, but flowing from covenant love. *3.* When we want a full assurance of Christ's love, we must live by a faithful adherence to him. Though I have not the sensible consolation I used to have, yet I will stick to this, Christ is mine, and I am his. *4.* Though she had said the same before, yet now she inverts the order, and asserts his interest in her first, *I am my beloved's*, entirely devoted and dedicated to him, and then her interest in him, and in his grace, *my beloved is mine*, and I am happy, truly happy in him. If our own hearts can but witness for us that we are his, there is no room left to question his being ours; for the covenant never breaks on his side. *5.* It is now her comfort, as it was then, that *he feedeth among the lilies*, that he takes delight in his people, and converseth freely with them, as we do with those with whom we feed; and therefore, though at present he be withdrawn, I shall meet with him again; *I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

4. ¶ Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners. *5.* Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Gilead. *6.* Thy teeth are as a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, whereof every one beareth twins, and there is not one barren among them. *7.* As a piece of a pomegranate are thy temples within thy locks. *8.* There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and virgins without number. *9.* My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bare her: the daughters saw her, and blessed her; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her. *10.* ¶ Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?

Now we must suppose Christ graciously returned to his spouse from whom he had withdrawn himself, returned to converse with her, for he speaks to her, and *makes her to hear joy and gladness*; returned to favour her, and had forgiven and forgotten all her unkindnesses, for he speaks very lovingly and respectfully to her.

1. He pronounceth her truly amiable, *ver. 4. Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah*, a city in the tribe of Manasseh, whose name signifies pleasant, or acceptable; the situation, no doubt, being very happy, and the buildings fine and uniform: *Thou art comely as Jerusalem*, a city compact together, *Psal. cxxii. 3.* and which Solomon had built and beautified, it was *the joy of the whole earth*, an honour to the world (whether they thought so or no) that there was such a city in it: It was the holy city, and that was the greatest beauty of it; and fitly is the church compared to it, for it was figured and typified by it. The gospel church is *the Jerusalem that is above*, *Gal. iv. 26. the heavenly Jerusalem*, *Heb. xii. 22.* in it God hath his sanctuary, and is in a special manner present, thence he has the tribute of praise issuing, it is his rest for ever, and therefore it is *comely as Jerusalem*, and, being so, is *terrible as an army with banners*. Church censures duly administered, strike an awe upon mens consciences; the word, the weapons of her warfare, *casts down imaginations*, *2 Cor. x. 5.* and even an unbeliever is convinced and judged by the solemnity of holy ordinances, *1 Cor. xiv. 24, 25.* The saints by faith *overcome the world*, *1 John v. 4.* nay, like Jacob, they have *power with God, and prevail*, *Gen. xxxii. 28.*

2. He owns himself in love with her, *ver. 5.* Though for a small moment, and in a little wrath, he had hid his face from her, yet now he gathers her with very surprizing instances of everlasting loving-kindness, *Isa. liv. 8.* Turn thine eyes towards me, so some

read it; turn the eyes of faith and love towards me, for they have lifted me up; look unto me and be comforted. When we are calling to God to turn the eye of his favour towards us, he is calling to us to turn the eye of our obedience towards him. We read it as a strange expression of love, *Turn away thine eyes from me*, for I cannot bear the brightness of them, *they have quite overcome me*, and I am prevailed with to overlook all that is past; as God said to Moses, when he interceded for Israel, *Let me alone*, or I must yield, *Exod. xxxii. 10.* Christ is pleased to borrow these expressions of a passionate lover, only to express the tenderness of a compassionate Redeemer, and the delight he takes in his redeemed, and in the workings of his own grace in them.

3. He repeats, almost word for word, part of the description he had given of her beauty, *chap. iv. 1, 2, 3.* her hair, her teeth, her temples, *ver. 5, 6, 7.* not because he could not have described it in other words, and by other similitudes, but to shew that he had still the same esteem of her since her unkindness to him, and his withdrawals from her, that he had before; lest she should think, that though he would not quite cast her off, yet he would think the worse of her while he knew her, he saith the same of her now that he had done, for those *to whom much is forgiven, will love the more*, and consequently will be the more beloved, for Christ has said, *I love those that love me*: He is pleased with his people, notwithstanding their weaknesses, when they sincerely repent of them, and return to their duty, and commends them, as if they were already arrived to perfection.

4. He prefers her before all competitors, and sees all the beauties and perfections of others meeting and centring in her, *ver. 8, 9.* There are, it may be, *threescore queens*, that, like Esther, have by their beauty attained to the royal state and dignity, and *fourscore concubines*, that kings have preferred before their own queens, as more charming, and these attended by their maids of honour, *virgins without number*, that, when there is a ball at court, appear in great splendor, with beauty that dazzles the eyes of the spectators, but *my dove, my undefiled is but one*, an holy one.

(1.) She excels them all. Go through all the world, and view the societies of men that reckon themselves wise and happy, kingdoms, courts, senates, councils, or whatever incorporations you may think valuable, they are none of them to be compared with the church of Christ; their honours and beauties are nothing to hers; *Who is like unto thee, O Israel*, *Deut. xxxiii. 29.* *iv. 6, 7.* There are particular persons, as *virgins without number*, that are famed for their accomplishments, the beauties of their address, language, and performances, but the beauty of holiness is beyond all other beauty; *my dove, my undefiled is one*, hath that one beauty, that she is a dove, an undefiled dove, and mine, and that makes her excel the queens and virgins, though they were never so many.

(2.) She includes them all. Other kings have many queens and concubines, and virgins, with whose conversation they entertain themselves, but *my dove, my undefiled*, is to me instead of all; in that one I have more than they have in all theirs. Or, though there be many particular churches, some of greater dignity, others of less, some of longer, others of shorter standing, and many particular believers of different gifts and attainments, some more eminent, others less so, yet they all constitute but one catholick church, are all but parts of that whole, and that is *my dove, my undefiled*. Christ is the centre of the church's unity; all the children of God that are scattered abroad are gathered by him, *John xi. 52.* and meet in him, *Eph. i. 10.* and are all his doves.

5. He shews how much she was esteemed, not by him only, but by all that had acquaintance with her, and stood in relation to her. It would add to her praise to say, *1.* That she was her mother's darling; she had that in her from a child which recommended her to the particular affection of her parents; as Solomon himself is said to have been tender, and *an only one in the sight of his mother*, *Prov. iv. 3.* so was she the only one of her mother, as dear as if she had been an only one; and if there were many more, yet she was the choice one of her that bare her; more excellent than all the societies of men this world ever produced: All the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, are nothing in Christ's account, compared with the church, which is made up of the excellent ones of the earth, the precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, and more excellent than their neighbours.

2. That she was admired by all her acquaintance, not only the daughters, that were her juniors, but even the queens and the concubines, who might have reason to be jealous of her as a rival, they all blessed her, and wished well to her, praised her, and spoke well of her; the daughters of Jerusalem called her the fairest among women; all agreed to give her the preeminence for beauty, and every sheaf bowed to hers. Note, *1.* Those that have any sense of things, cannot but be convinced in their consciences (whatever they say) that godly people are excellent people; many will give them their good word, and more their good will. *2.* Jesus Christ takes notice what people think and speak of his church, and is well pleased with them that honour such as fear the Lord, and takes it ill of those that do despise them, particularly when they are under a cloud, that offend any of his little ones.

6. He produceth the encomium that was given of her, and makes it his own, *ver. 10. Who is she, that looks forth as the morning?* This is applicable both to the church in the world, and to grace in the heart.

(1.) They are amiable as the light, the most beautiful of all visible things; christians are, or should be, the lights of the world. The patriarchal church *looked forth as the morning*, when the promise of the Messiah was first made known, and *the day spring from on high visited* this dark world. The Jewish church was *fair as the moon*; the ceremonial law was an imperfect light, it shone by reflection, it was changing as the moon, did not make day, nor was *the sun of righteousness* yet risen; but the Christian church is *clear as the sun*, exhibits a great light to them that sat in darkness. Or, we may apply it to the kingdom of grace, the gospel kingdom. 1. In its rise it *looks forth as the morning* after a dark night; it is *discovering*, Job xxxviii. 12, 13. and very acceptable, *looks forth* pleasantly as a clear morning; but it is small in its beginnings, and scarce perceptible at first. 2. It is at the best in this world but *fair as the moon*, which shines with a borrowed light, which has her changes and eclipses, and her spots too, and, when at the full, doth but rule by night. But, 3. When it is perfected in the kingdom of glory, then it will be *clear as the sun*, the church *clothed with the sun*, with Christ, *the sun of righteousness*, Rev. xii. 1. They that love God, will then be *as the sun when he goes forth in his strength*, Judg. v. 31. Matt. xiii. 43. they shall shine in inexpressible glory, and that which is perfect will then come; there shall be no darkness, no spots, *Isa. xxx. 26.*

(2.) The beauty of the church, and of believers, is not only amiable, but awful, *as an army with banners*. The church in this world is *as an army*, as the camp of Israel in the wilderness; its state is militant; it is in the midst of enemies, and is engaged in a constant conflict with them: Believers are soldiers in this army. It has its *banners*; the gospel of Christ is an ensign, *Isa. xi. 12.* the love of Christ, *Cant. ii. 4.* It is marshalled, and kept in order, and under discipline; it is *terrible* to its enemies, as Israel in the wilderness was, *Exod. xv. 14.* When Balaam saw Israel encamped according to their tribes, by their standards, colours displayed, he said, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob!* Numb. xxiv. 5. When the church preserves her purity, she secures her honour and victory; when she is *fair as the moon*, and *clear as the sun*, she is truly great and formidable.

11. I went down into the garden of nuts, to see the fruits of the valley, and to see whether the vine flourished, and the pomegranates budded: 12. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib. 13. Return; return; O Shulamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee: what will ye see in the Shulamite? as it were the company of two armies.

Christ being now returned to his spouse, and the breach being entirely made up, and the falling out of these lovers being the renewing of love, Christ here gives an account both of the distance, and of the reconciliation.

1. That when he was withdrawn from his church as his spouse, and did not comfort her, yet even then he had his eye upon it as his garden, which he did take care of, *ver. 11. I went down into the garden of nuts*, or nutmegs, *to see the fruits of the valley*, with complacency and concern, to see them as my own. When he was out of sight, he was no further off than the garden, hid among the trees of the garden, in a low and dark valley; but then he was observing *how the vine flourished*, that he might do all that to it which was necessary to promote its flourishing, and might delight himself in it; as a man doth in a fruitful garden. He went to see whether *the pomegranates budded*; Christ observes the first beginnings of the good work of grace in the soul, and the early bud-dings of devout affections and inclinations there; and is greatly well pleased with them, as we are with the blossoms of the spring.

2. That yet he could not long content himself with this, but suddenly felt a powerful, irresistible inclination in his own bosom to return to his church, as his spouse, being moved with her lamentations after him, and her languishing desire towards him, *ver. 12. Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Ammi-nadib*; I could not any longer keep at a distance, my repentings were kindled together, and I presently resolved to fly back to the arms of my love, my dove. Thus Joseph made himself strange to his brethren for a while, to chastise them for

their former unkindnesses, and make trial of their present temper, till he could no longer restrain himself, but, *or ever he was aware*, burst out into tears, and said, *I am Joseph*, Gen. xlv. 1, 3. And now the spouse perceives, as David did, *Psal. xxxi. 22.* that though she *said in her haste, she was cut off from before his eyes*, yet at the same time he *heard the voice of her supplications*, and became *like the chariots of Ammi-nadib*, which were noted for their beauty and swiftness. *My soul put me in the chariots of my willing people*, so some read it; the chariots of their faith, and hope, and love, their desires and prayers, and expectations, which they sent after me to fetch me back, as chariots of fire, with horses of fire. Note, 1. Christ's people are, and ought to be a willing people. 2. If they continue seeking Christ, and longing after him, even when he seems to withdraw from them, he will graciously return to them in due time, perhaps, sooner than they think, and with a pleasing surprise. No chariots sent for Christ shall return empty. 3. All Christ's gracious returns to his people take rise from himself: It is not they, but his own soul that puts him into the chariots of his people; for he is gracious, because he will be gracious, and loves his Israel, because he would love them: Not for their sakes, be it known to them.

3. That he being returned to her, kindly courted her return to him, notwithstanding the discouragements she laboured under. Let her not despair of obtaining as much comfort as ever she had before this distance happened, but take the comfort of the return of her beloved, *ver. 13. Here,*

(1.) The church is called the *Shulamite*, referring either to Solomon, the bridegroom in type, by whose name she is called, in token of her relation to him, and union with him; thus believers are called Christians from Christ; or, referring to Salem, the place of her birth and residence, as the woman of Shunem is called the Shunamite: Heaven is the Salem whence the saints have their birth, and where they have their citizenship; those that belong to Christ and are bound for heaven, shall be called Shulamites.

(2.) She is invited to return, and the invitation most earnestly pressed, *Return, return*; and again, *return, return*; recover the peace thou hast lost and forfeited, come back to thy former composedness, and cheerfulness of spirit. Note, Good christians, after they have had their comfort disturbed, are sometimes hardly pacified, and need to be earnestly persuaded to return again to their rest: As revolting sinners have need to be called to again and again, *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?* so disquieted saints have need to be called to again and again, *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye droop? why art thou cast down, O my soul?*

(3.) Being returned, she is desired to shew her face, *that we may look upon thee*: Go no longer with thy face covered like a mourner; let those that have made their peace with God, *lift up their faces without spot*, Job xxii. 26. let them come boldly to his throne of grace; Christ is pleased with the cheerfulness and humble confidence of his people, and would have them look pleasant. Let us *look upon thee*, not I only, but the holy angels, who rejoice in the consolation of saints; as well as in the conversion of sinners; not I only, but all the daughters; Christ and believers are pleased with the beauty of the church.

(4.) A short account is given of what is to be seen in her. The question is asked, *What will you see in the Shulamite?* and it is answered, *as it were the company of two armies*.

1. Some think she gives this account of her self; she is shy of appearing, unwilling to be looked upon, having, in her own account, no form or comeliness: Alas! saith she, *What will ye see in the Shulamite?* nothing that is worth your looking upon; nothing but *as it were the company of two armies* actually engaged; where nothing is to be seen but blood and slaughter: The watchmen had smitten her, and wounded her; and she carried in her face the marks of those wounds, looked as if she had been fighting: She had said, *chap. i. 6. Look not upon me, because I am black*, here, look not upon me, because I am bloody. Or, it may note the constant struggle that is between grace and corruption in the souls of believers; they are in them *as two armies* continually skirmishing, which makes her ashamed to shew her face.

2. Others think her beloved gives this account of her. I will tell you what you shall see in the *Shulamite*; you shall see as noble a fight as that of two armies, or two parts of the same army drawn out in rank and file; not only *as an army with banners*, but as *two armies*, with a majesty double to what was before spoken; she is as *Mahanaim*, as the two hosts which Jacob saw, Gen. xxxii. 1, 2. an host of saints, and an host of angels ministering to them; the church militant, the church triumphant. Behold *two armies*; in both the church appears beautiful.

C H A P. VII.

In this chapter, 1. Christ the royal Bridegroom goes on to describe the beauties of his spouse, the church, in many instances, and to express his love to her, and the delight he has in her conversation, ver. 1, --- 9. 2. The spouse, the church, expresseth her great delight in him, and the desire that she had of communion and fellowship with him, ver. 10, --- 13. Such mutual esteem and endearment is there between Christ and believers! And what is heaven but an everlasting interchanging of loves between the holy God and holy souls!

1. **H**OW beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince's daughter! the joints of thy thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. 2. Thy navel is like a round goblet, which wanteth not liquor: thy belly is like an heap of wheat, set about with lilies. 3. Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins. 4. Thy neck is as a tower of ivory, thine eyes like the fish-pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim: thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon, which looketh toward Damascus. 5. Thine head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thine head like purple; the king is held in the galleries. 6. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights! 7. This thy stature is like to a palm-tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. 8. I said, I will go up to the palm-tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples; 9. And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine, for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing the lips of those that are asleep, to speak.

The title which Jesus Christ here gives to the church is new, *O prince's daughter*, agreeing with *Psalms* xlv. 13. where she is called *the king's daughter*: She is so in respect of her new birth, born from above, begotten of God, and his workmanship, bearing the image of the King of kings, and guided by his Spirit. She is so by marriage, Christ, by betrothing her to himself, though he found her mean and despicable, has made her a *prince's daughter*; she has a princely disposition, something in her truly noble and generous: She is daughter and heir to the prince of the kings of the earth; *if children, then heirs*.

Now here we have,

(1.) A large description of the beauty of the spouse, which some think is given by the virgins her companions, and that those were they who called upon her to return; it seems rather to be given by Christ himself, and that it is designed to express his love to her, and delight in her, as before, *chap. iv. 1, &c.* and, *chap. vi. 5, 6.* The similitudes are here different from what they were before, to shew that the beauty of holiness is such as nothing in nature can reach, you may still say more of it, and yet still come short of it. That commendation of the spouse, *chap. iv.* was immediately upon the espousals, *chap. iii. 11.* this here upon her return from a by-path, *chap. vi. 13.* yet this exceeds that, to shew the constancy of Christ's love to his people; *he loves them to the end*, since he made them *precious in his sight, and honourable*. The spouse had described the beauty of her beloved in ten particulars, *chap. v. 11, &c.* and now he describes her in as many, for he will not be behind-hand with her in respects and endearments: Those that honour Christ he will certainly honour, and make honourable. As the prophet, in describing the corruptions of degenerate Israel, reckons *from the sole of the foot, even unto the head*, *Isa. i. 6.* so here the beauties of the church are reckoned from foot to head, that, as the apostle speaks, when he is comparing the church, as here, to the natural body, *1 Cor. xii. 23.* *more abundant honour* might be bestowed on those parts of the body which we think to be less honourable, and which therefore lacked honour, ver. 24.

1. Her feet are here praised; the feet of Christ's ministers are beautiful in the eyes of the church, *Isa. lli. 7.* and her feet are here said to be beautiful in the eyes of Christ; *How beautiful are thy feet with shoes!* When believers, being made free from the captivity of sin, (*Acts xii. 8.*) stand fast in the liberty with which they are made free, preserve the tokens of their enfranchisement, have their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and walk steadily according to the rule of the gospel, then their feet are beautiful with shoes, they tread firm, being well armed against the troubles they meet with in their way. When we rest not in

good affections, but those are accompanied with sincere endeavours and resolutions, then our feet are beautified with shoes. See *Ezek. xvi. 10.*

2. The joints of the thighs are here said to be like jewels, and those curiously wrought by a cunning workman. This is explained by, *Eph. iv. 16.* and, *Col. ii. 19.* where the mystical body of Christ is said to be held together by joints and bands, as the hips and knees (both which are the joints of the thighs) serve the natural body in its strength and motion; the church is then comely in Christ's eyes, when those joints are kept firm by holy love and unity, and the communion of saints. When believers act in religion from good principles, and are steady and regular in their whole conversation, and turn themselves easily to every duty in its time and place, then the joints are like jewels.

3. The navel is here compared to a round cup or goblet, that wants not any of the agreeable liquor that one would wish to find in it, such as David's cup that run over, *Psalms* xxiii. 5. well shaped, and not as that miserable infant, whose navel was not cut, *Ezek. xvi. 4.* The fear of the Lord is said to be health to the navel. See *Prov. iii. 8.* When the soul wanteth not that fear, then the navel wanteth not liquor.

4. The belly is like a heap of wheat in the storeroom, which, perhaps, was sometimes to make shew, adorned with flowers. The wheat is useful, the lilies beautiful; there is every thing in the church which may be to the members of that body either for use, or for ornament. All the body is nourished from the belly; it notes the spiritual prosperity of a believer, and the healthful constitution of the soul, all in good plight.

5. The breasts are like two young roes that are twins, ver. 3. By the breasts of the church's consolations these are nourished, who are born from its belly, (*Isa. xlv. 3.*) and by the navel received nourishment in the womb. This comparison we had before, *chap. iv. 5.*

6. The neck, which before was compared to the tower of David, *chap. iv. 4.* is here compared to a tower of ivory, so white, so precious: Such is the faith of the saints, by which they are joined to Christ their head. The name of the Lord, improved by faith, is to the saints as a strong and impregnable tower.

7. The eyes are likened to the fish-pools in Heshbon, or the artificial fish-ponds, by a gate, either of Jerusalem, or of Heshbon, which is called Bath-rabbim, the daughter of a multitude, because a great thoroughfare. The understanding, the intentions of a believer, are clean and clear as these ponds: The eyes weeping for sin, are as fountains, *Jer. ix. 1.* and comely with Christ.

8. The nose like the tower of Lebanon, the forehead or face set like a flint, *Isa. l. 7.* undaunted as that tower was impregnable: So it notes the magnanimity and holy bravery of the church; or, as others, a spiritual sagacity to discern things that differ, as animals strangely distinguish by the smell. This tower looks towards Damascus, the head city of Syria, noting the boldness of the church in facing its enemies, and not fearing them.

9. The head like Carmel, a very high hill near the sea, ver. 5. The head of a believer is lifted up above his enemies, *Psalms* xxvii. 6. above the storms of the lower region, as the top of Carmel was, pointing heavenwards. The more we get above this world, and the nearer to heaven, and the more secure and serene we become by that means, the more amiable we are in the eyes of the Lord Jesus.

10. The hair of the head is said to be like purple: It notes the universal amiableness of a believer in the eyes of Christ, even to the hair; or, as some understand it, the pins with which the hair is dressed. Some by the head and the hair understand the governors of the church, who, if they be careful to do their duty, add much to her comeliness. The head like crimson (so some read it) and the hair like purple, the two colours worn by great men.

(2.) The complacency which Christ takes in his church, thus beautified and adorned; she is lovely indeed, if she be so in his eyes; as he puts the comeliness upon her, so it is his love that makes this comeliness truly valuable; for he is an unexceptionable Judge.

1. He delighted to look upon his church, and to converse with it, rejoicing in that habitable part of his earth; the king is held in the galleries, and cannot leave them. This is explained by, *Psalms* cxxxii. 13, 14. The Lord hath chosen Zion, saying, This is my rest for ever, here will I dwell. And, *Psalms* cxlvii. 11. The Lord taketh pleasure in those that fear him. And if Christ hath such delight in the galleries of communion with his people, much more

more reason have they to delight in them; and to reckon *a day there better than a thousand.*

2. He was even struck with admiration at the beauty of his church, *ver. 6. How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love; how art thou made fair?* so the word is; not born so, but made so with the comeliness which I have put upon thee. Holiness is a beauty beyond expression; the Lord Jesus is wonderfully pleased with it; the outward aspect of it is fair, the inward disposition of it is pleasant, and highly agreeable, and the complacency he has in it is inexpressible: *O my dearest for delights,* so some read it.

3. He determined to keep up communion with his church.

(1.) To take hold of her as of the boughs of a palm-tree. He compares her stature to a palm-tree, *ver. 7.* so straight, so strong doth she appear, when she is looked upon in her full proportion: The palm-tree is observed to flourish most when it is loaded; so the church, the more it has been afflicted, the more it has multiplied; and the branches of it are emblems of victory. Christ saith, *I will go up to the palm-tree,* to entertain my self with the shadow of it, *ver. 8.* and *I will take hold of its boughs,* and observe the beauty of them. What Christ hath said he will do in favour to his people, we may be sure he will do, for his kind purposes are never suffered to fall to the ground; and if he take hold of the boughs of his church, take early hold of her branches, when they are young and tender, he will keep his hold, and not let them go.

(2.) To refresh himself with her fruits: He compares her breasts (her pious affections towards him) to clusters of grapes, a most pleasant fruit, *ver. 7.* and he repeats it, *ver. 8.* they shall be, i. e. they shall be to me as clusters of the vine; which make glad the heart: Now I come up to the palm-tree, now thy graces shall be exerted, and excited; Christ's presence with his people kindles the holy, heavenly fire in their souls, and then their breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, a cordial to themselves, and acceptable to him: And since God at first breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, and the breath of the new life still, the smell of their nostrils is like the smell of apples, or oranges, which is pleasing and reviving. The Lord smelled a sweet savour from Noah's sacrifice, *Gen. viii. 21.* And lastly, the roof of her mouth is like the best wine, *ver. 9.* her spiritual taste and relish; or the word she speaks to God and man, which come not from the teeth outward, but from the roof of the mouth; these are pleasing to God; the prayer of the upright is his delight: And when those that fear the Lord speak one to another as becomes them, the Lord hearkens, and hears with pleasure, *Mal. iii. 16.* It is like that wine which is, 1. Very palatable, and grateful to the taste; it goes down sweetly, it goes straightly, so the margin reads it; it moves it self aright, *Prov. xxiii. 31.* The pleasures of sense seem right to the carnal appetite, and go down smoothly, but they are often wrong, and, compared with the pleasure of communion with God, they are harsh and rough; nothing goes down so sweetly with a gracious soul, as the wine of God's consolations. 2. It is a great cordial; the presence of Christ, by his Spirit, with his people, shall be reviving and refreshing to them, as that strong wine which makes the lips, even of those that are asleep, (i. e. that are ready to faint away in a deliquium) to speak: Unconverted sinners are asleep, faints are often drowsy and listless, and half asleep; but the word and Spirit of Christ will put life and vigour into the soul, and out of the abundance of the heart, that is thus filled, the mouth will speak. When the apostles were filled with the Spirit, they spake with tongues the wonderful works of God, *Acts ii. 10, 12.* and they who, in opposition to being drunk with wine, wherein is excess, are filled with the Spirit, speak to themselves in psalms and hymns, *Eph. v. 18, 19.* When Christ is thus commending the sweetness of his spouse's love, excited by the manifestation of his, she seems to put in that word, *for my beloved,* as in a parenthesis: Is there any thing in me that is pleasant or valuable? as it is from, so it is for my beloved: And then he delights in our good affections and services, when they are all for him, and devoted to his glory.

10. *I am my beloveds,* and his desire is towards me. 11. Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field: let us lodge in the villages. 12. Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. 13. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

These are the words of the spouse, the church, the believing soul, in answer to the kind expressions of Christ's love in the foregoing verses.

1. She here triumphs in her relation to Christ, and her interest in him, and in his name will she boast all the day long. With what a transport of joy and holy exultation doth she say, *ver. 10. I am my beloved's,* not my own, but entirely devoted to him, and owned by him. If we can truly say, that Christ is our best beloved, we may be confident that we are his; and he will save us, *Psal. cxix. 94.* The gracious discoveries of Christ's love to us, should engage us greatly to rejoice in the hold he has of us, his sovereignty over us, and propriety in us; which is no less a spring of comfort, than a bond of duty. Intimacy of communion with Christ should help to clear up our interest in him.

Glorying in this, that she is his to serve him, and reckoning that her honour, she comforts herself with this, that his desire is towards her, i. e. he is her husband; it is a periphrasis of the conjugal relation, *Gen. iii. 16.* Christ's desire was strongly towards his chosen remnant, when he came from heaven to earth to seek and save them; and when, in pursuance of his undertaking, he was even straitened till the baptism of blood he was to pass through for them, was accomplished, *Luke xii. 50.* He desired Zion for an habitation; this is a comfort to believers, that whosoever flights them, Christ has a desire towards them, such a desire as will again bring him from heaven to earth to receive them to himself; for he longs to have them all with him, *John xvii. 24. xiv. 3.*

2. She humbly and earnestly desires communion with him, *ver. 11, 12. Come, my beloved,* let us take a walk together, that I may receive counsel, instruction, and comfort from thee, and may make known my wants and grievances to thee, with freedom, and without interruption. Thus Christ walked with the two disciples that were going to the village, called Emmaus, and talked with them, till he made their hearts burn within them. Observe here,

(1.) Having received fresh tokens of his love, and full assurances of her interest in him, she presseth forward towards further acquaintance with him; as blessed Paul, who desired yet more and more of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, *Phil. iii. 8.* Christ hath made it appear, how much his desire is towards us, and we are very ungrateful, if ours be not towards him. Note, Communion with Christ is that which all that are sanctified earnestly breathe after; and the clearer discoveries he makes them of his love, the more earnestly do they desire it. Sensual pleasures pall the carnal appetite, and soon give it a surfeit, but spiritual delights whet the desires, whose language is, *Nothing more than God,* but still more and more of him. Christ had said, *I will go up to the palm-tree; Come,* saith she, *Let us go.* The promises Christ hath made us of communion with him, are not to supersede, but quicken and encourage our prayers for that communion.

(2.) She desires to go forth into the fields and villages; to have this communion with him. Those that would converse with Christ must go forth from the world, and the amusements of it, must avoid every thing that would divert the mind and be a hindrance to it when it should be wholly taken up with Christ; we must contrive how to attend upon the Lord without distraction, *1 Cor. vii. 35.* for therefore the spouse here covets to get out of the noise of the town: *Let us go forth to him without the camp,* *Heb. xiv. 13.* Solitude and retirement befriends communion with God, therefore Isaac went out into the field to meditate and pray. Enter into thy closet and shut thy door. A believer is never less alone than when alone with Christ, where no eye sees.

(3.) Having business to go abroad to look after the grounds, she desires the company of her beloved. Note, Wherever we are, we may keep up our communion with God, if it be not our own fault, for he is always at our right hand, his eye always upon us, and both his word and his ear always nigh us. By going about our worldly affairs with heavenly holy hearts, mixing pious thoughts with common actions, and having our eyes ever towards the Lord, we may take Christ along with us wherever we go. Nor should we go any whither; where we cannot in faith ask him to go along with us.

(4.) She is willing to rise betimes, to go along with her beloved: *Let us get up early to the vineyards;* it intimates her care to improve opportunities of conversing with her beloved; when the time appointed is come we must lose no time, but, as the woman, *Mark xvi. 2. go very early,* though it be to a sepulchre, if we be in hopes to meet him there. Those that will go abroad with Christ must begin betimes with him, early in the morning of their days, must begin every day with him; seek him early, seek him diligently.

(5.) She

(5.) She will be content to take up her lodging in the villages, the huts, or cottages which the country people built for their shelter, when they attended their business in the fields, there, in these mean and cold dwellings, she will gladly reside, if she may but have her beloved with her; his presence will make them fine and pleasant, and convert them into palaces. A gracious soul can reconcile it self to the poorest accommodations, if it may have communion with God in them.

(6.) The most pleasant delightful fields, even in the spring-time, when the country is most pleasant, yet will not satisfy her unless she have her beloved with her. No delights on earth can make a believer easy unless he enjoy God in all.

3. She desires to be better acquainted with the state of her own soul, and the present posture of its affairs, *ver. 12. Let us see if the vine flourish.* Our own souls are our vineyards; they are, or should be, planted with vines and pomegranates, choice and useful trees; we are made keepers of these vineyards, and therefore are concerned often to look into them, to examine the state of our own souls; to see whether the *vine flourisheth*, whether our graces be in act and exercise; whether we be fruitful in the fruits of righteousness; and whether our fruit abound. And especially let us enquire whether the *tender grape appear*, and whether the *pomegranates bud forth*, what good motions and dispositions there are in us that are yet but young and tender, that they may be protected and cherished with a particular care, and may not be nipped, or blasted, or rubbed off, but cultivated, that they may bring forth fruit unto perfection. In this enquiry into our own spiritual state, it will be good to take Christ along with us; because his presence will make the *vine flourish*, and the *tender grape appear*, as the returning sun revives the gardens: and because to him we are concerned to approve ourselves; if he sees the *vine flourish* and the *tender grape appear*; if we can appeal to him, *thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee*; if his Spirit witness with our spirit, that our souls prosper, it is enough. And if we would be acquainted with ourselves, we must beg of him to search and try us, to help us in the search, and discover us to ourselves.

4. She promiseth to her beloved the best entertainment she can give him at her country-seat; for he will come in to us and sup with us, *Rev. iii. 20.*

(1.) She promiseth him her best affections; and whatever else she had for him it would utterly be contemned, if her heart were not entire for him; *therefore will I give thee my loves*; I will repeat the professions of it, honour thee with the tokens of it, and the out-goings of my soul towards thee in adorations, and desires shall be quickened and enlarged, and my heart offered up to thee in a holy fire.

(2.) She promiseth him her best provision, *ver. 13.* There we shall find not only pleasant odours, for the *mandrakes give a smell*, the *love-flowers*, or *lovely ones*, so the word signifies, or, the *love-fruits*; it was something that was in all respects very grateful, so valuable, that Rachel and Leah had like to have fallen out about them, *Gen. xxx. 14.* But we shall also find that which is good for food, as well as pleasant to the eye, all the rarities that the country affords, *at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits.* Note, 1. The fruits and exercises of grace are pleasant to the Lord Jesus. Note, 2. These must be carefully laid up for him, devoted to his service and honour, must be always ready to us when we have occasion for them, as that is which is laid up at our gates; that, by our bringing forth much fruit, he may be glorified, *John xv. 18.* Note, 3. There is a great variety of these pleasant fruits, with which our souls should be well stocked; we must have all sorts of them, grace for all occasions, *new and old*, as the good householder has in his treasury; not only the products of this year, but remainders of the last, *Matth. xiii. 52.* We must not only have that ready to us for the service of Christ, which we have heard, and learned, and experienced lately, but must retain that which we have formerly gathered; nor must we content ourselves only with what we have laid up in store in the days of old, but, as long as we live, must be still adding something new to it, that our stock may encrease, and we may be *thoroughly furnished for every good work.* Note, 4. Those that truly love Christ will think all they have, even their most *pleasant fruits*, and what they have treasured up most choicely, too little to be bestowed upon him, and he is welcome to it all: if it were more and better it should be at his service. It is all from him, and therefore it fit it should be all for him.

C H A P. VIII.

The affections between Christ and his spouse are as strong and lively here, in this closing chapter of the song, as ever, and rather more so. (1.) The spouse continues her importunity for a more intimate communion and fellowship with him, *ver. 1, -- 3.* (2.) She charges the daughters of Jerusalem not to interrupt her communion with her beloved, *ver. 4.* and they thereupon admire her dependence on him, *ver. 5.* (3.) She begs of her beloved, whom she raiseth up by her prayers, *ver. 5.* that he would by his grace confirm that blessed union with him to which she was admitted, *ver. 6, 7.* (4.) She makes intercession for others also, that care might be taken of them, *ver. 8, 9.* and pleaseth herself with the thoughts of her own interest in Christ, and his affection to her, *ver. 10.* (5.) She owns herself his tenant for a vineyard she held of him at Baal-hamon, *ver. 11, 12.* (6.) The song concludes with an interchanging of parting requests: Christ chargeth his spouse that she should often let him hear from her, *ver. 13.* And she begs of him that he would hasten his return to her, *ver. 14.*

1. **O** That thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee, yea, I should not be despised. 2. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mothers house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate. 3. His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me. 4. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love until he please.

Here, 1. The spouse wisheth for a constant intimacy and freedom with the Lord Jesus. She was already betrothed to him, but the nuptials being not yet solemnized and published (the bride, the Lamb's wife will not be compleatly ready till his second coming) she was obliged to be shy, and to keep at some distance, she therefore wisheth she may be taken for his sister, he having called her so, *chap. v. 1.* and that she might have the same chaste and innocent familiarity with him, that a sister has with a brother, an own brother, that *sucked the breasts* of the same mother with her, who would therefore be exceeding tender of her, as Joseph was of his brother Benjamin. Some make this to be the prayer of the Old Testament saints for the hastning of Christ's incarnation, that the church might be the better acquainted with him, when, *forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood*, he should also himself likewise take part of the same, and not be ashamed to call them brethren. It is rather the wish of all believers for a more intimate communion with him, that they might *receive the spirit of sanctification*, and so Christ might be as their brother, *i. e.* they might be as his brethren, which then they are, when by grace they are made partakers of the divine nature, and he that *sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified are both one*, *Heb. ii. 11, &c.* It becomes brethren and sisters, the children of the same parents, that have been nursed at the same breast, to be very loving to, and tender of, one another; such a love the spouse desires might be between her and her beloved, that she might call him brother.

2. She promiseth herself then the satisfaction of making a more open profession of her relation to him, than at present she could make. *When I should find thee without*, any where, even before company, *I would kiss thee* as a sister doth her own brother, especially her little brother that is now *sucking the breasts of her mother* (for so some understand it); I would use all the decent freedom with thee that could be, and *should not be despised* for it, as doing any thing unbecoming the modesty of my sex. The church, since Christ's incarnation, can better own him than she could before; when she would be laughed at for being so much in love with one that was not yet born. Christ is become as our brother, wherever we find him, therefore let us be ready to own our relation to him, and affection for him, and not fear being despised for it, nor regard that, no more than David did when he danced before the ark; *if this be to be vile, I will be yet more vile*; nay, hope that we shall not be despised so much as some imagine; *of the maid servants,*
of

of whom thou hast spoken, I shall be had in honour, wherever we find the image of Christ, though it be without, among those that do not follow him with us, we must love it, and testify that love, and we shall not be despised for it, but catholick charity will gain us respect.

3. She promiseth to improve the opportunity she should then have of cultivating an acquaintance with him, *ver. 2. I would lead thee*, as my brother, by the arm, and hang upon thee, I would shew thee all the house of my precious things, would bring thee into my mother's house, i. e. into the church, into the solemn assemblies, *chap. iii. 4.* into my closet, for there the saints have most familiar communion with Christ. And there thou wouldst instruct me, (so some read it) as brethren inform their sisters of what they desire to be instructed in. Those that know Christ shall be taught of him; and therefore we should desire communion with Christ, that we may receive instruction from him. He is come that he might give us an understanding: or, my mother would instruct me, when I have thee with me: It is the presence of Christ, in and with his church, that makes the word and ordinances instructive to her children, which shall all be taught of God.

4. She promiseth him to bid him welcome to the best she had, would cause him to drink of her spiced wine, and the juice of her pomegranate, and bid him welcome to it, wishing it better for his sake. The exercise of grace and the performance of duty is spiced wine to the Lord Jesus, very acceptable to him, as expressive of a grateful sense of his favours. Those that are pleased with Christ, must study to be pleasing to him; and they will not find him hard to be pleased. He reckons hearty welcome his best entertainment, and if he have that he will bring his entertainment along with him.

5. She doubts not but to experience his tender care of her, and affection to her, *ver. 3.* that she should be supported by his power, and kept from fainting in the hardest services and sufferings, *his left hand should be under my head*, and that she should be comforted with his love, *his right hand should embrace me*. Thus Christ laid his right hand upon John, when he was ready to die away, *Revel. i. 17. Dan. x. 10, 18.* It may be read as it is *chap. ii. 6. his left hand is under my head*, for the words are the same in the original, and so it speaks an immediate answer to her prayer, she was answered with strength in her soul, *Psal. cxxxviii. 3.* While we are following hard after Christ, his right hand sustains us, *Psal. lxxiii. 8. underneath are the everlasting arms.*

6. She chargeth those about her to take heed of doing any thing to interrupt the pleasing communion she now had with her beloved, *ver. 4.* as she had done before, when he thus strengthened and comforted her with his presence, *chap. ii. 7. Let me charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem*, and reason with you, *Why should you stir up, and why should you awake my love until he will?* The church, our common mother, chargeth all her children, that they never do any thing to provoke Christ to withdraw, which we are very prone to do. Why should you put such an affront upon him? Why should you be such enemies to yourselves? We should thus reason with ourselves when we are tempted to do that which will grieve the Spirit. What! Am I weary of Christ's presence, that I affront him, and provoke him to depart from me? Why should I do that which he will take so unkindly, and which I shall certainly repent of?

5. (Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?) I raised thee up under the apple-tree: there thy mother brought thee forth, there she brought thee forth that bare thee. 6. ¶ Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. 7. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

Here, 1. The spouse is very much admired by those about her. It comes in in a parenthesis, but in it gospel-grace lies as plain, and as much above ground, as any where in this mystical song. *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?* Some make these the words of the Bridegroom, expressing himself well-pleased with her reliance on him, and resignation of herself to his conduct. They are ra-

ther the words of the daughters of Jerusalem, to whom she spoke, *ver. 4.* they see her, and bless her; the angels in heaven, and all her friends on earth, are the joyful spectators of her bliss. The Jewish church came up from the wilderness, supported by the divine power and favour, *Deut. xxxii. 10, 11.* The Christian church was raised up from a low and desolate condition by the grace of Christ relied on, *Galatians iv. 27.* Particular believers are then amiable, nay, admirable, and divine grace is to be admired in them, when by the power of divine grace they are brought up from the wilderness, leaning, with a holy confidence and complacency, upon Jesus Christ their beloved. This speaks the beauty of a soul, and the wonders of divine grace, (1.) In the conversion of sinners: A sinful state is a wilderness, remote from communion with God, barren and dry, and in which there is no true comfort; it is a wandering wanting state; out of this wilderness we are concerned to come up, by true repentance, in the strength of the grace of Christ, supported by our beloved, and carried in his arms. (2.) In the consolation of saints. A soul convinced of sin, and truly humbled for it, is in a wilderness, quite at a loss; and there is no coming out of this wilderness, but leaning on Christ as our beloved by faith, and not leaning to our own understanding, nor trusting to any righteousness or strength of our own, as sufficient for us, but going forth, and going on, in the strength of the Lord God, and making mention of his righteousness, even his only, who is the Lord our righteousness. (3.) In the salvation of those that belong to Christ. We must go up from the wilderness of this world, having our conversation in heaven; and at death we must remove thither, leaning upon Christ; must live and die by faith in him; to me to live is Christ, and it is he that is gain in death.

2. She addresseth herself to her beloved.

1. She puts him in mind of the former experience which she and others had had of comfort and success in applying to him. (1.) For her own part, *I raised thee up under the apple-tree*, i. e. I have many a time wrestled with thee by prayer, and have prevailed. When I was alone in the acts of devotion, retired in the orchard under the apple-tree (which Christ himself was compared to, *chap. ii. 3.*) as Nathanael under the fig-tree, *John i. 48.* meditating and praying, then I raised thee up, to help me and comfort me, as the disciples raised him up in the storm, saying, *Master, carest thou not that we perish?* *Mark iv. 38.* and the church, *Psal. xlv. 23. Awake, why sleepest thou?* Note, The experience we have had of Christ's readiness to yield to the importunities of our faith and prayer, should encourage us to continue instant in our addresses to him, to strive more earnestly, and not to faint: *I sought the Lord, and he heard me*, *Psal. xxxiv. 4.* (2.) Others also had had like experience of comfort in Christ, as it follows there, *Psal. xxxiv. 5. They looked unto him*, as well as I, *and were lightened*, there thy mother brought thee forth, the universal church, or believing souls, in whom Christ was formed, *Galat. iv. 15.* They were in pain for the comfort of an interest in thee, and travailed in pain, with great sorrow, so the word here signifies. But they brought thee forth, the pangs did not continue always, they that had travailed in convictions, at last brought forth in consolations, and the pain was forgotten, for joy of the Saviour's birth; by this very similitude our Saviour illustrates the joy which his disciples would have in his return to them, after a mournful separation for a time, *John xv. 22.* After the bitter pangs of repentance, many a one has had the blessed birth of comfort; Why then may not I?

2. She begs of him that her union with him might be confirmed, and her communion with him continued, and made more intimate, *ver. 6. Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.* (1.) Let me have a place in thy heart, an interest in thy love; this is that which all those desire above any thing, that know how much their happiness is bound up in the love of Christ. (2.) Let me never lose the room I have in thy heart; let thy love to me be ensured, as that deed which is sealed, not to be revoked, that cabinet which is sealed up, not to be robbed. Let nothing ever prevail, either to separate me from thy love, or by suspending the communications of it to deprive me of the comfortable sense of it. (3.) Let me be always near and dear to thee, as the signet on thy right hand, not to be parted with, *Jer. xxii. 24. Engraven upon the palms of thy hand*, *Isa. xlix. 14.* Loved with a peculiar love. (4.) Be thou my High-priest; let my name be written on thy breastplate, nearer thy heart, as the names of all the tribes were engraven, like the engravings of a signet, in twelve precious stones, on the breastplate of Aaron, and also on two precious stones on the two shoulders, or arms, of the ephod, *Exod. xxviii. 11, 12, 21.* (5.) Let thy power be engaged for me, as an evidence of thy love to me; let me

be not only a *seal upon thine heart*, but a *seal upon thine arm*; let me be ever born up in thine arms, and know it to my comfort. Some make these to be the words of Christ to his spouse, commanding her to be ever mindful of him, and of his love to her; however, if we desire and expect that Christ should set us as a *seal on his heart*, sure we cannot do less than set him as a *seal on ours*.

3. To enforce this petition, she pleads the power of love, of her love to him, which constrained her to be thus pressing for the tokens of his love to her.

1. Love is a violent, vigorous passion, (1.) It is *strong as death*; the pains of a disappointed lover, are like the pains of death; nay, the pains of death are slighted, and made nothing of in pursuit of the beloved object. Christ's love to us was *strong as death*, for it broke through death itself, *he loved us, and gave himself for us*; the love of true believers to Christ is *strong as death*, for it makes them dead to every thing else; it even parts between soul and body, while the soul, upon the wings of devout affections, soars up to heaven, and even forgets that it is yet clothed and clogged with flesh: Paul, in a rapture of this love, knew not whether he was in *the body, or out of the body*. By it a believer is crucified to the world. (2.) *Jealousy is cruel as the grave*, which swallows up and devours all; those that truly love Christ, are jealous of every thing that would draw them from him, and especially jealous of themselves, lest they should do any thing to provoke him to withdraw from them, and, rather than do so, would *pluck out a right eye, and cut off a right hand*, than which, what can be more cruel? Weak and trembling saints, that conceive a jealousy of Christ, doubting of his love to them, find that jealousy to prey upon them, like the grave; nothing wastes the spirits more, but it is an evidence of the strength of their love to him. (3.) *The coals thereof*, its lamps, and flames, and beams, are very strong, and burn with incredible fury and irresistible force, as the *coals of fire that have a most vehement flame, a flame of the Lord*, (so some read it) a powerful piercing flame, as the lightning, *Psalms xxix. 7*. Holy love is a fire that begets a mighty heat in the soul, and consumes the dross and chaff that is in it, melts it down, like wax, into a new form, and carries it upward, as the sparks, towards God and heaven.

2. Love is a valiant, victorious passion. Holy love is so; the reigning love of God in the soul is constant and firm, and will not be drawn off from him, either by fair means or foul, by *life nor death*, Rom. viii. 38.

1. Death, and all its terrors, will not frighten a believer from loving Christ. *Many waters*, though they will quench fire, *cannot quench this love*, no, nor the *floods drown it*, ver. 7. the noise of these waters will strike no terror upon it, let them do their worst, Christ shall still be the best beloved. The overflowing of these waters will strike no damp upon it, but it will enable a man to rejoice in tribulation: *Though he slay me, I will love him, and trust in him*. No waters could quench Christ's love to us, nor any floods drown it, he waded through the greatest difficulties, even seas of blood: Love fate king upon the floods; let nothing then abate our love to him.

2. Life, and all its comforts, will not entice a believer from loving Christ. *If a man could hire him with all the substance of his house*, to take his love off from Christ, and set it upon the world and the flesh again; he would reject the proposal with the utmost disdain; as Christ, when the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them, were offered him, to buy him off from his undertaking; *Get thee hence, Satan*; it would utterly be contemned; offer those things to those that know no better. Love will enable us to repel, and triumph over temptations, from the smiles of the world, as much as from its frowns. Some give this sense of it; *If a man would give all the substance of his house to Christ, as an equivalent, instead of love, to excuse it, it would be contemned*. He seeks not ours, but us; the heart, not the wealth. *If I give all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love, it is nothing*, 1 Cor. xiii. 1. Thus believers stand affected to Christ; the gifts of his providence cannot content them without the assurances of his love.

8. ¶ We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister, in the day when she shall be spoken for? 9. If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver: and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar. 10. I am a wall, and my breasts like towers;

then was I in his eyes as one that found favour. 11. Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon, he let out the vineyard unto keepers: every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand *pieces* of silver. 12. My vineyard which is mine is before me: thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand; and those that keep the fruit thereof, two hundred.

Christ and his spouse having sufficiently confirmed their love to each other, and agreed it to be on both sides *strong as death*, and inviolable, they are here, in these verses, like a loving husband and his wife consulting together about their affairs, and considering what they should do. Yoke-fellows having laid their hearts together, lay their heads together to contrive about their relations, and about their estates; and accordingly this happy pair are here advising with one another about a sister they had, and a vineyard they had.

(1.) They are here consulting about their sister, their little sister, and the disposing of her.

1. The spouse proposeth her case with a compassionate concern; ver. 8. *We have a little sister, and she has no breasts*, she is not grown up to maturity; *what shall we do for this little sister of ours in the day that she shall be spoken for?* so as that we may do well for her.

(1.) This may be understood as spoken by the Jewish church, concerning the Gentile world. God had espoused the church of the Jews to himself, and she was richly endowed, but what shall become of the poor Gentiles, *the barren that has not born, and the desolate*, Isa. liv. 1. Their condition (say the pious Jews) is very deplorable and forlorn; they are *sisters*, children of the same fathers, God, and Adam, but they are *little*, because not dignified with the knowledge of God; they *have no breasts*, no divine revelation, no scriptures, no ministers, no breasts of consolation drawn out to them, whence they might suck, being *strangers to the covenants of promise*; no breasts of instruction themselves to draw out to their children, to nourish them, (1 Pet. ii. 2.) *What shall we do for them?* we can but pity them, and pray for them: Lord, what wilt thou do for them? The saints in Solomon's time might know, from David's psalms, that God had mercy in store for them, and they begged it might be hastened to them. Now the tables are turned, the Gentiles are betrothed to Christ, and ought to return the kindness by an equal concern for the bringing in of the Jews again, our eldest sister, that once had breasts, but now has none. If we take it in this sense, the unbelieving posterity of these pious Jews contradicted this prayer of their fathers; for, when the day came that the Gentiles should be *spoken for*, and courted to Christ, instead of considering what to do for them, they plotted to do all they could against them, which filled up the measure of their iniquity, 1 Thess. ii. 16. Or,

(2.) It may be applied to any other that belong to the election of grace, but are yet uncalled; they are remotely related to Christ, and his church, and sisters to them both; *other sheep that are not of this fold*, John x. 16. Acts xviii. 10. They *have no breasts*, none yet fashioned, *Ezek. xvi. 7*. no affection to Christ, no principle of grace. *The day will come, when they shall be spoken for*; when the chosen shall be called, shall be courted for Christ, by the ministers, the friends of the Bridegroom: A blessed day it will be, a day of visitation! What shall we do in that day to promote the match? to conquer their coyness, and persuade them to consent to Christ, and present themselves chaste virgins to him? Note, Those that through grace are brought to Christ themselves, should contrive what they may do to help others to him, to carry on the great design of his gospel, which is to espouse souls to Christ, and convert sinners to him, from whom they have diverted.

2. Christ soon determines what to do in this case, and his spouse agrees with him in it, ver. 9. *If she be a wall*, if the good work be once begun with the Gentiles, with the souls that are to be called in, if the *little sister*, when she shall be spoken for, by the gospel, will but receive the word, and build her self upon Christ, the foundation, and frame her doings to turn to the Lord, as the wall is in order to the house, *we will build upon her a palace of silver*, or build her up into such a palace; we will carry on the good work that is begun, till the wall becomes a palace, the wall of stone, a palace of silver; which goes beyond the boast of Augustus Cæsar, that what he found brick, he left marble. This *little sister*, when once she is joined to the Lord, shall be made to grow into a holy temple, a habitation of God through the Spirit, Eph. ii. 21, 22. *If she be a door*, when this palace comes to be finished, and the doors of this wall set up, which

which was the last thing done, *Neb. vii. 1.* then *we will enclose her with boards of cedar*, i. e. will carefully and effectually protect her that she shall receive no damage: *We will do it, Father, Son, and holy Ghost*, all concur in contriving, carrying on, and crowning the blessed work when the time comes: Whatever is wanting shall be set in order, and the work of faith shall be fulfilled with power: Though the beginnings of grace be small, the latter end shall greatly encrease: The church is in care concerning those that are yet uncalled: Let me alone, faith Christ, I will do all that which is necessary to be done for them: Trust me with it.

3. The spouse takes this occasion to acknowledge with thankfulness his kindness to her, *ver. 10.* She is very willing to trust him with her *little sister*, for she herself had had great experience of his grace, and for her part she owed her all to it. *I am a wall, and my breasts like towers.* This she speaks not as upbraiding her little sister that had no breasts, but comforting herself concerning her, that he who had made her what she is, that had built her up upon himself, and made her to grow up to maturity, could, and would, do the same kindness for those whose case she bore upon her heart. *Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour.* See,

(1.) What she values her self by, her having found favour in the eyes of Jesus Christ; those are happy, truly happy, and for ever so, that have the favour of God, and are accepted of him.

(2.) How she ascribes the good work of God in her, to the good will of God towards her; he hath *made me a wall, and my breasts as towers*, and then, in that instance, more than in any thing, I experienced his love to me. *Hail, thou that art highly favoured*, for in thee Christ is formed.

(3.) What pleasure God takes in the work of his own hands. When we are made as a *wall*, as a *brazen wall*, *Jer. i. 18. xv. 20.* that stands firm against *the blast of the terrible ones*, *Isa. xxv. 4.* then God takes delight in us to do us good.

(4.) With what joy and triumph we ought to speak of God's grace towards us, and with what satisfaction we should look back upon the special times and seasons, when *we were in his eyes as those that find favour*; these were days never to be forgotten.

(2.) They are here consulting about a *vineyard* they had in the country, the church of Christ on earth, considered under the notion of a *vineyard*, *ver. 11, 12.* *Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon*, had a kingdom in the possession of a multitude, a numerous people. As he was a type of Christ, so his vineyard was a type of the church of Christ. Our Saviour has given us a key to these verses, in the parable of the vineyard let out to unthankful husbandmen; *Mat. xxi. 35.* The bargain was, that every one of the tenants having so much of the vineyard assigned him as would contain a thousand vines; he was to pay the annual rent of a *thousand pieces of silver*; for we read, *Isaiah vii. 23.* that in a fruitful soil there were *a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings.* Observe,

1. Christ's church is his vineyard; a pleasant and peculiar place, privileged with many honours; he delights to walk in it as a man in his vineyard; and is pleased with its fruits.

2. He has entrusted each of us with this vineyard, as *keepers* of it; the privileges of the church are that good thing which he has committed to us, to be kept as a sacred trust; the service of the church is to be our business, according as our capacity is: *Son, go work to day in my vineyard*: Adam, in innocency, was to *dress the garden, and to keep it.*

3. He expects rent from those that are employed in his vineyard, and entrusted with it: *He comes seeking fruit*, and requires gospel duty of all those that enjoy gospel privileges: Every one, of what rank or degree soever, must bring glory and honour to Christ, and do some service to the interest of his kingdom in the world, in consideration of what benefit and advantage they enjoy by their share of the privileges of the vineyard.

4. Though Christ has *let out his vineyard to keepers*, yet still it is his, and he has his eye always upon it for good; for if he did not watch over it *night and day*, *Isaiah xxvii. 1, 2.* the watchmen, to whom he has let it out, would keep it *but in vain*, *Psal. cxxxvii. 1.* Some take these for Christ's words, *ver. 12.* *My vineyard which is mine is before me*; and they observe how he harps upon his propriety in it; it is *my vineyard, which is mine*, so dear is his church to him, it is *his own in the world*, *John xiii. 1.* and therefore he will always have it under his protection; it is his own, and he will look after it.

5. The church that enjoys the privileges of the vineyard, must

have them always before her; the keeping of the vineyard requires constant care and diligence. They are rather the words of the spouse, *My vineyard which is mine is before me.* She had lamented her fault and folly, in not keeping her *own vineyard*, *chap. i. 6.* but now ~~she~~ resolves to reform. Our hearts are our vineyards, which we must *keep with all diligence*; and therefore we must have a watchful, jealous eye upon them at all times.

6. Our great care must be to pay our rent for what we hold of Christ's vineyard, and to see that we do not go behind-hand, nor disappoint the messengers he sends to *receive the fruits*, *Matt. xxi. 34.* *Thou, O Solomon, must have a thousand*, and shalt have. The main of the profits belong to Christ; to him and his praise all our fruits must be dedicated.

7. If we be careful to give Christ the praise of our church privileges, we may then take to our selves the comfort and benefit of them. If the owner of the vineyard has had his due, the keepers of it shall be well paid for their care and pains, they shall have *two hundred*, which, no doubt, was looked upon as good profit. They that work for Christ are working for themselves, and shall be unspeakable gainers by it.

13. Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the companions hearken to thy voice: cause me to hear it. 14. Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe; or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

Christ and his spouse are here parting for a while, she must stay below in the gardens on earth, where she hath work to do for him, he must remove to the mountains of spices in heaven, where he has business to attend for her, as an *Advocate with the Father*: Now observe, with what mutual endearments they part:

(1.) He desires to hear often from her; she is good at her pen, she must be sure to write to him, she knows how to direct it, *ver. 13.* *Thou that, for the present, dwellest in the gardens*, dressing and keeping them, till thou remove from the garden below, to the paradise above: *Thou, O believer, whoever thou art, that dwellest in the gardens of solemn ordinances, in the gardens of church-fellowship and communion, the companions are so happy as to hear thy voice, cause me to hear it too.*

Observe, 1. Christ's friends should keep a good correspondence one with another; and, as dear companions, speak often to one another, *Mal. iii. 16.* and hearken to one another's voice; they should edify, and encourage, and respect one another: They are companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ, and therefore, as fellow-travellers, should keep up mutual freedom, and not be shy of, or strange to one another; the communion of saints is an article of our covenant, as well as an article of our creed; to exhort one another daily, and be glad to be exhorted one by another. *Hearken to the voice of the church*, as far as it agrees with the voice of Christ, his companions will do so.

2. In the midst of our communion with one another, we must not neglect our communion with Christ, but let him see our countenance, and hear our voice; he here bespeaks it; the companions *hearken to thy voice*, it is a pleasure to them, *cause me to hear it*: Thou makest thy complaints to them when any thing grieves thee, why dost thou not bring them to me, and let me hear them? Thou art free with them, be as free with me, pour out thy heart to me. Thus Christ, when he left his disciples, ordered them to send to him upon every occasion, *Ask, and ye shall receive.* Note, Christ not only accepts and answers, but even courts his peoples prayers, not reckoning them a trouble to him, but an honour, and a *delight*, *Prov. xv. 8.* We *cause him to hear* our prayers, when we not only pray, but wrestle, and strive in prayer. He loves to be pressingly importuned, which is not the manner of men. Some read it, *Cause me to be heard*: Thou hast often an opportunity of speaking to thy companions, and they hearken to what thou sayest; speak of me to them, let my name be heard among them, let me be the subject of thy discourse, "One word of Christ, (as archbishop Usher used to say) before you part." No subject is more becoming, or should be more pleasing.

(2.) She desires his speedy return to her, *ver. 14.* *Make haste, my beloved, to come again, and receive me to thy self; be thou like a roe, or a young hart upon the mountains of spices*; let no time be lost; it is pleasant dwelling here in the gardens, but to depart, and be with thee, is far better; that therefore is it I wish, and wait, and long for: *Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.* Observe,

1. Though Jesus Christ be now retired, he will return: The heavens, those high mountains of sweet spices, must contain

tain him till the times of refreshing shall come; and those times will come, when every eye shall see him, in all the pomp and power of the upper and better world; the mystery of God being finished, and the mystical body compleated.

2. True believers, as they are looking for, so they are hastening to the coming of that *day of the Lord*; not that they would have him make more haste than good speed, but that the intermediate counsels may all be fulfilled, and then that the end may come, the sooner the better: Not that they think him *slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness*, but thus they express the strength of their affections to him, and the vastness of their expectations from him when he comes again.

3. Those only that can in sincerity call Christ their *beloved*, their best *beloved*, can, upon good grounds, desire him to hasten his second coming: As for those whose hearts go a whooring after the world, and who set their affections on the things of the earth, they cannot love his appearing, but dread it rather, because then the earth, and all the things of it, which they have chosen for their portion, will be burnt up: But they that truly love Christ, long for his second coming, because it will be the crown both of his glory, and their bliss.

4. The comfort and satisfaction which we sometimes have

in communion with God in grace here, should make us breathe the more earnestly after the immediate vision, and compleat fruition of him, in the kingdom of glory. The spouse, after an endearing conference with her beloved, finding it must break off, concludes with this affectionate request for the perfecting and perpetuating of this happiness in the future state. The clusters of grapes that meet us in this wilderness, should make us long for the full vintage in Canaan. If a day in his courts be so sweet, what then will an eternity within the veil be! If this be heaven, O that I were there!

5. It is good to conclude our devotions with a joyful expectation of the glory to be revealed, and holy, humble breathings towards it. We should not part but with the prospect of meeting again. It is good to conclude every sabbath with thoughts of the everlasting sabbath, which shall have no night at the end of it, nor any week-day to come after it: To conclude every sacrament with thoughts of the everlasting feast, when we shall sit down with Christ at his table in his kingdom, to rise no more, and drink of the wine new there; and to break up every religious assembly, in hopes of the *general assembly of the church of the first-born*, when time and days shall be no more. Let the blessed Jesus hasten that blessed day. *Why are his chariot-wheels so long a coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?*

The end of the Second Volume.

